

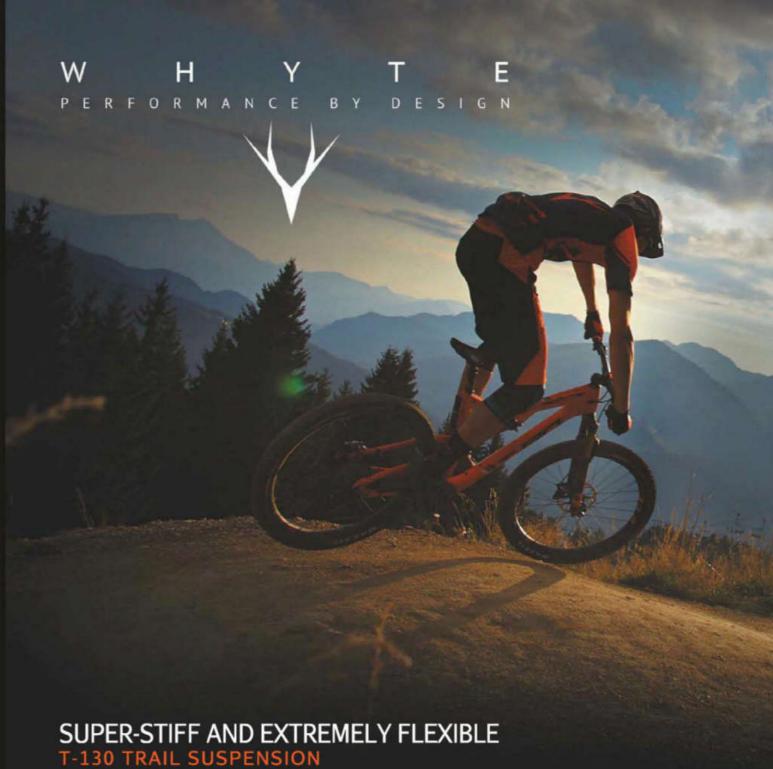


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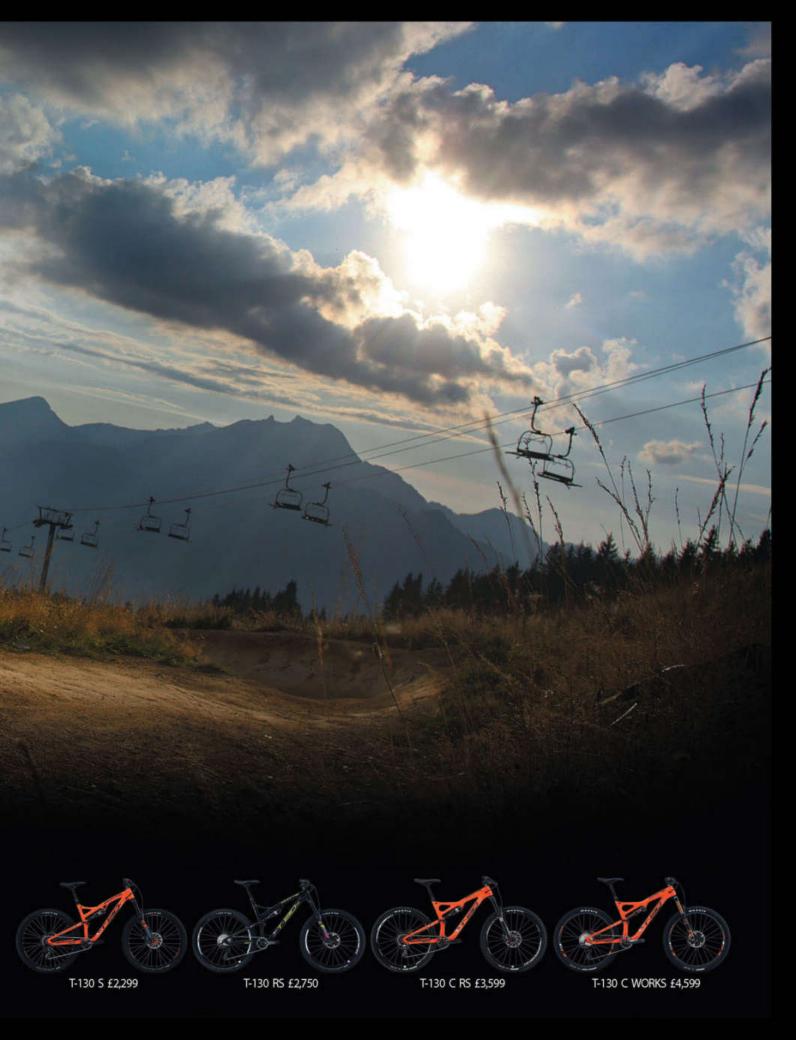
Whyte's evolved 2016 geometry, coupled with 130mm of QUAD-4 suspension, means the T-130 is fast, fun and versatile, wherever you ride - from your local or purpose built trails all the way to the Alps.

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For more information - or to try one for yourself, contact your local Whyte retailer.



T-130 SX £1,899













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EDITOR'S LETTER

Generation next

Age is just an (increasingly large) number for mountain bikers

atch an mtb video online and vou get a clear picture of what our sport is all about — crazy twentysomethings in beanies and baggies living and breathing the mountain bike



lifestyle in exotic corners of the globe.

That's one reason why those of us in our (late) thirties, forties and beyond tend to feel a sense of pride in being grown-ups who never really grew up, big kids messing around on bikes and having the time of our lives.

Fact is, though, there's way more of us than those gnarly videos would have you believe. Go to some busy trails and you'll certainly see teenagers and twentysomethings... but don't be surprised if they're riding with their parents.

Mountain biking has matured as a hobby, and riders who've grown up trying to get mates to try it are now taking their families instead.

I've got family on my mind because my second little girl is expected any day now. What I know about my first is that nothing gives her more pleasure than playing on her bike. And even though taking up mountain biking may not bode so well for keeping her bones intact, nothing would make me happier than heading out on the trails



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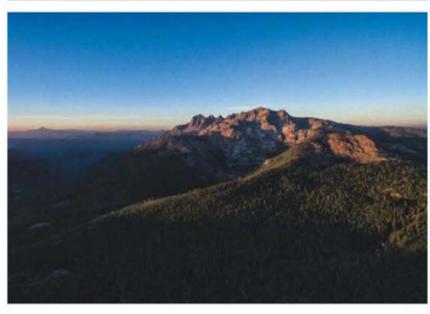


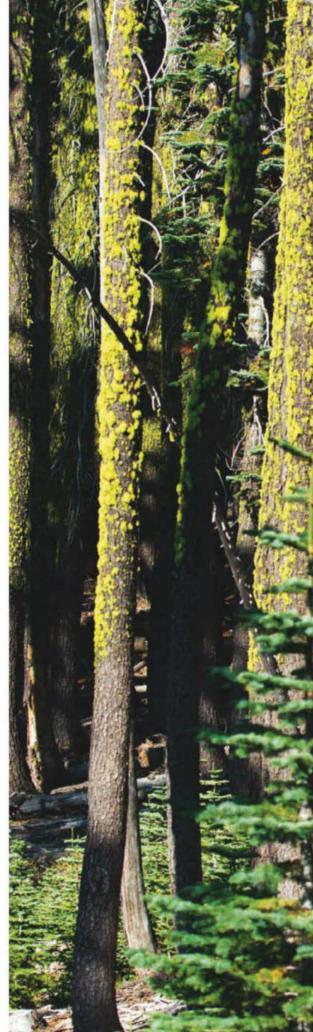


BIG PICTURE





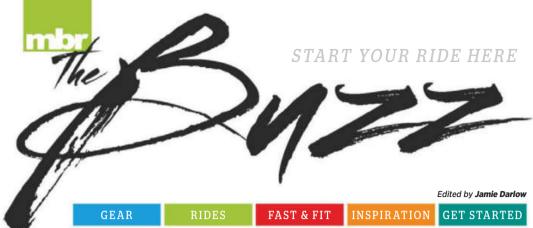












QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"IT'S THE FINAL
UPLIFT...I'M
SHARING THE
VAN WITH THE
SPECTRE OF THE
LAST RUN"

That's the spirit, page 64



Not quite trail centre, not quite natural riding spot, Dunkeld in Perthshire is hard to beat for its sheer variety of riding. With a baseline of superb backcountry trails, top-notch walkers' paths to the hilltops (perfectly legal riding in Scotland, of course) and beautiful woodland enduro tracks, it's fast becoming the hottest riding spot in the UK right now.

"Over the last four years the amount of trails that are brand new, built from scratch, or old stalker paths that have been opened up, is huge," says Adam Flint, from Progression Bikes in Dunkeld. "The venue has grown exponentially over the last 18 months especially."

So what's putting Dunkeld on the map now? Downhill racing found the place years ago, with the Scottish Downhill Association running a stage of its DH series off the local hill, Craig Vinean. But for the last three years, a locally-organised enduro race has snaked its way around the slopes, and in 2015 around 270 riders took part, including big names like Joe Barnes and Ben Cathro.

"If the trail network grows much more they might have to run the 2016 enduro over two days," Adam says. "It's not a bad place to be."

Dunkeld has some facilities too, although it's: "more of a natural hub than a trail centre", Adam tells us. There's an uplift service from Progression Bikes, which also runs demos, bike hire and coaching, and there are some great cafes in town too. And the best thing? "You can step off the train and be on some amazing trails within 20 minutes," Adam says.

DROP THE WIRES

The world's first wireless dropper post just popped up

We already have electronic suspension and shifting, and SRAM has just launched a road bike groupset using wireless technology — which we're hoping will cross over to mountain bikes in the next couple of years. And now we have the very first wireless dropper post: it's called the Vyron and it's made by German brand Magura — better known for its disc brakes. By wireless we mean there's no hose, no cable, no wire — just a seatpost and a remote control.

First things first — even though the Vyron is electric it doesn't go down on its own; you still have to drop it using your body weight. The electric component is simply a switch that opens a hydraulic valve inside the post. All the other internals are the same as in most other droppers on the market.

The Vyron has 150mm of travel, with absolute freedom to set your saddle height within the upper and lower limits. The remote itself is designed to operate Magura's eLect equipped forks and shocks, which is why it's a little bulky and has some other switches. It weighs hardly anything, though, and it can be mounted anywhere on the handlebar.

Magura uses ANT+ wireless technology, a system it already runs on its eLect forks and shock, with a custom profile written specifically for the Vyron.







shouldn't accidentally operate the post.

A NiMH rechargeable battery allows the post to be activated 400 times before it needs recharging. Run time depends on how often you drop your saddle during a ride, but just in case you run out of juice in the middle of nowhere, Magura has built in some reserve power — once the battery is fully drained you still have 20 emergency actuations, activated via a small button on the back of the post. Charge time from fully empty is around three hours using the standard micro USB charge socket.

At 595g, the Vyron isn't really any lighter than a standard dropper, but with no cable or hydraulic hose to worry about, you can fit it in seconds, which is great for bike shops and manufacturers. It also means you can move the post from bike to bike, which is dead handy if you have a fleet.

Initially available in 30.9 and 31.6 mm sizes, the Magura Vyron will retail for around £350 and will be available later this year. For more info go to magura.com.





RE-BOOT: TRAIL SHOES

A new concept in bike footwear will change the way we think about comfort

At first glance the new OWN (Only What's Necessary) FR-01 flat pedal shoe looks a lot like one of those waterproof winter boots XC riders wear, but apparently it's designed for DH/Freeride/Gravity use. That's because OWN thinks it's about time enduro and downhill riders got the same level of comfort.

The FR-01 is a modular system with inner and outer components. The shell is made from cutresistant Kevlar and gets a moulded TPU heel cup to improve the comfort and fit. On the top is a tight-fitting gaiter to stop dirt ingress, but it's also stretchy to allow free ankle movement. To stop the laces cutting off circulation, memory foam is used in the tongue. That's the only place you'll find it, though, because foam

absorbs water, adding weight and drying time.

Vibram supplies the rubber sole, using a mix of the Mega Grip and super-tacky Hydro Grip compounds for ultimate grip. The tread at the pedal contact area has a criss-cross design with narrow channels that are just the right size for pedal pins, while taller lugs on the toe and heel

are siped (split) and splay (just like the knobs on a tyre) for off-thebike traction.

Two inner boots are included a waterproof version with fully taped seams and a lighter, more breathable option. Both feature a D30 insert, which reduces vibration and increases impact resistance -

soft rubber is all well and good but only if your feet stay on the pedals.

A £160 price tag is not to be sniffed at, but the FR-01 has some unique features and uses technology previously unseen in mountain bike footwear. We can't wait to try them. Available spring 2016, whatsnecessary.com.





KNEE PADS

Don't knock them till you've tried them

RACE FACE AMBUSH

£69.95. silverfish-uk.com

by conventional foam for

handlebar knocks.

With flexible D30 padding and terry towelling inside next to vour knee. the Ambush is supremely comfortable; a fit and forget pad. It offers good protection too, the D3O hardens on impact and it's backed up



TROY LEE SHOCK DOCTOR

£54.99, fisheroutdoor.co.uk

The coolest pads we've tested, the Shock Doctors move air around your knee to keep you from overheating. They're comfortable and low profile, but still give decent

protection and remain securely In place whether climbing or descending An **mbr** favourite



FOX LAUNCH PRO

£44.99. foxhead.com

Old-school in design (and cost) with a hard plastic knee-cup inside, the Launch Pro pad is still a top performer comfy when riding, well secured with



HOT STUFF

WHAT WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT THIS MONTH



MOST WANTED

GIRO MONTARO £129.99

One of the best trail bike helmets ever made was the Giro Xen. With its extended rear coverage, adjustable visor and casual styling, it was the helmet to have. Then Giro killed it. The Giro Xar tried to plug the hole, but it didn't really fit the same and felt too much like a cross-country helmet.

It's been about four years but Giro has finally resurrected the Xen — or rather, it has created a trail helmet that looks identical, even down to the X shape on the back, but with a new name and some up-to-date features.

Called the Montaro, this new lid is fully in-moulded, bottom wrapped and with Giro's roll-cage reinforcement, which is a sort of nylon web that's moulded into the polystyrene. To add further protection, it features a MIPs (Multi-Directional Impact Protection System) liner, but unlike most

helmets with this technology, it's integrated into the helmet so doesn't impact on sizing or cause pinching. Inside the helmet is a lighter-weight Roc Loc Air retention system with several hydrophilic and anti-microbial pads, which Giro says can absorb up to 10 times their weight in sweat.

Like the Bontrager Rally, the Montaro features a big POV visor that allows you to park your goggles on the front of the helmet. Built into the vents at the back of the helmet are several rubber grippers to help hold the goggle strap in place. There's also full camera mount integration for on-bike filming with a handy breakaway feature.

The Montaro is offered in eight colours as well as a women's model called the Montara, which is only available in three tones (thankfully none of them pink). zyro.co.uk





CLIPPED AND PINNED

Want to try riding clipped-in but don't want to spank a load of money on pedals? Try Boardman's new MTB Pro. They're cheap, light and have adjustable release tension, handy when you're just starting out on clips. £24.99, halfords.com



ETHERNET

KS is known for dropper posts but now it makes stems too. This cute little Ether is available in 50 and 70mm lengths and has some nice touches, like a conical seat under the bolt heads to stop misalignment. £55, jungleproducts.co.uk



HOODY HIDE

Originally designed for getting changed on the beach, the Booicore will easily cover your blushes, and much more, when stripping off in the car park. It's soft terry towelling, blue only and one-size-fits-all. £33.99, thebooicorestore.com



TOOLS GOLD

We think the Multi 10 is one of Crank Brothers's best tools. There's no chain breaker but it has everything you need to make trailside repairs and adjustments. It even comes in a limited-edition green if you don't like bling. £17.99, extrauk.co.uk



CHIP STOP

Keep your frame box-fresh by slapping on some AMS XL Honeycomb Frameguard. The high-impact, rub-resistant semi-rigid PVC has a honeycomb structure that stops scuffs and cable rub. £23.99, hookippoducts.co.uk



GRAB A GRANNY

Steel SRAM X-Sync rings should be on your wish list for the winter — they're harder-wearing and cheaper than the standard aluminium rings, and available in small 28, 30 and 32t sizes. £19.99, fisheroutdoor.co.uk



ANCHORS AHOY

With their long-life, consistent performance and low price, UK firm 35bikes' sintered brake pads are perfect for winter riding. Most brands are catered for, including some older models. £5.99, hookitproducts.co.uk



MADE BY JULI

Juli Furtado is one of the all-time great riders. Her women-specific components range includes this bar and grip combo, which has a thinner diameter for smaller hands. Available in 5mm or 15mm rise. £65, jungleproducts.co.uk



FAT FENDER

If you have big wheels on your bike, you'll need a bigger mudguard. RRP Fatguard is one of the first designed for Plus-size forks and wheels. It even has the same Seal Guard feature as the company's regular designs. Black only. £11.99, extrauk.co.uk

THREE-DAY PERFECTION

Booked a long weekend off work? Head to one of the UK's best riding hotspots

Coniston is the perfect base for a long weekender - relatively devoid of people, with a lake to ride around and some obscenely good natural singletrack in the vicinity

DAY 1: Around Coniston: From town (Landranger 98/SD301975), head SW up the Walna Scar Road for 3km then SE on a grassy BW to Torver. Take the A593 south for 1km, then take a lane and then trail SW to woodland. Turn E then S at Green Moor, then E and SE to Blawith. Turn L, then jink R and then L to High Nibthwaite. Now climb NE, keeping straight ahead at Low Parkamoor and continuing into the forest, where you descend from Lawson Park to Brantwood to finish.

GPS download: po.st/Coniston

- **DAY 2:** Get yourself to Torver again and enjoy a loop around the Dunnerdale Fells, linking with the pub at Seathwaite if you fancy. GPS download: po.st/Dunnerdale
- **DAY 3:** Grizedale: hit the trail centre or mix in some natural stuff too.
- Guidebook: Lake District Mountain Bike Routes by Tom Hutton
- More info: conistontic.org

Wedged between the Beacons and the Black Mountains, and surrounded by great pubs, Crickhowell is about as good as it gets for natural riding

- **DAY 1:** Grwyne Fechan Classic: From town (Landranger 161/SO219184), take lanes north for nearly 10km to Hermitage. Continue NW, climbing all the time, to Bwlch Trumau, then descend NW to the road. Flick N then W to Castell Dinas and head N on trail then lane, past Ffosrhys. A steep trail leads E over Y Das, then drops to the road at Blaen-v-cwm. Head S for 2km then follow fire roads W then S to emerge on Disgwlfa. Brilliant singletrack heads SW to Henbant, where permissive BW drops to the road. Lanes and tracks lead W to Llanbedr, where you rejoin your outward leg. GPS download: po.st/Crickhowell
- **DAY 2:** Head to Talybont-on-Usk and ride the infamous Gan.
- DAY 3: Pay a visit to BikePark Wales or the Black Mountains Cycle Centre, or run down the canal to Gilwern and clamber up over the Blorenge.
- Guidebook: Wales Mountain Biking by Tom Hutton
- More info: visitcrickhowell.co.uk

Easy to get to and brilliant; it's no wonder the Peak is popular. There are a few good bases, but Hope has good cafes, pubs and riding

- DAY 1: A loop of Ladybower. Start at the cafe (Landranger 110/SK171835), follow the A6187 to Castleton and stay R to follow the broken Mam Tor Road then proper roads up onto Mam Tor's ridge. NE to Hollins Cross and descend to Nether Booth. At Clough Farm take the BW to Crookstone Barn. Then NW and NE to the road, and NE and SE to Hagg Farm. N then S to Fairholmes, then S on the E shore of the reservoir. Climb E to Derwent Edge, S to Whinstone Lee Tor, then E again to Cutthroat Bridge, and SW to the road. S for 1km, cross the dam, then S on cycle track and lanes to Thornhill. From here it's all lanes to Hope.
- GPS download: po.st/Ladybower
- **DAY 2:** Head W from Mam Tor for the classic Jacob's Ladder loop.
- **DAY 3:** Head to Ladybower again and head N over Cut Gate. Job done.
- Guidebook: Dark Peak Mountain Biking by Jon Barton
- More info: peakdistrict-nationalpark.com





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MONOCOQUE UNI-DIRECTIONAL T700 CARBON CONSTRUCTION

800MM WIDE WITH 20MM RISE

9DEG BACK SWEEP, 4DEG UPSWEEP

DI2 COMPATIBLE OPTION

WEIGHT 214G









THE SEVEN STAGES Our blueprint to a successful-ish day out on the mtb trails

TODAY WORK,
TOMORROW THE WORLD!

Emails and texts fly through the ether all week with big ideas for riding somewhere different: the next hill over, a day at Afan or a long weekend in Scotland. As Friday approaches, money, family matters and general organising apathy mean the usual car park beckons.

THE LONG WAIT TO FREEDOM

The big day. Up early, you rushed breakfast and drove with gay abandon. Everything's ready, your bike's set up and your body poised. Now you just have to wait an hour or so in the car park for that last straggler of a so-called friend to turn up. You know they'll have plausible excuse — "bad traffic, car broke down, dog caught fire" — but really they just couldn't get out of bed.

TOO FAST, TOO FURIOUS

After all that waiting, when you finally set

THE SECOND WAIT

It takes a while to recover (except for the friend who's 'in training'), and by the time you do, an interesting conversation has sprung up about the latest bikes, your awful boss or next season's must-have shoes. Twenty minutes have passed before anyone notices this is neither the time nor the place for chit-chat; the rightful place for that is in the pub. Or A&E.

THE FIRST STOKE

What we've been waiting for. Nervous excitement is left behind at the first corner of the first descent of the day, and you remember that this is why you ride: for the sensation of grip, g-force and guts, and the feeling of being at the limits of control. Bliss. At the bottom you tell everyone what the trail was like; the fact that they rode it at the same time is irrelevant.

SPANNER IN THE WORKS
After messing about at the bottom of the descent and swapping stories it's only when you set off again that a mechanical is found. By the Laws of Faffing, the more people on your ride the more time it'll take to fix: one mate and you'll be rolling in minutes; a group of 20 and night will fall before you've re-seated that tyre. If it's really problematic then the 'expert' mechanics will tell you they usually carry that spare part... but they left it in their other pack.

7 MAN DOWN

Rolling again, and your group will invariably have lost at least one member. They either got bored at the mechanical, got lost on the climb back up or pre-chickened out on the big scary jump/drop/chute coming up. Either way you're sure they'll be fine and carry on regardless. Now you're at the jump-drop-chute it's time to roll out your excuses —"I'm on the wrong bike and tyres", "I'm too hung-over" or "I've got a sore earlobe" all work well. "Next time," we tell ourselves, before rolling back to the car park for cake, beer or both.



CANT GET DUAL CROWN AGGRES-SION. ON A SINGLE CROWN FORK.

LYPIK IS BACK. TORQUE CAP DROPOUTS. CHARGER DAMPER EQUIPPED. 180MM TRAVEL.

PROVE *CAN'T* WRONG.







FINGERS CROSSED

There's a fine line between pre-race routines and energy-sapping superstitions

For years now at mbrwe've been putting our socks on inside out and wearing our lucky chamois shorts to stave off crashing and hurting ourselves. Turns out, none of this makes any difference, according to sports scientist Will Harrison, who's diagnosed us with a bad case of superstition.

"It's an irrational thought process, caused by our belief in supernatural forces outside of the things we can control," Will says.

Nevertheless, creating superstitions and rituals is one of the body's control mechanisms to help manage anxiety and 'fear of failure'. We do it to help us relate to successful experiences

or disassociate from disastrous ones. But it all goes wrong when superstitions start adding to our stress levels instead of reducing them, when we could be doing something productive and practical to prepare for a ride.

"Instead of being a nifty trick up our sleeve, superstition can become the insidious gremlin on our shoulders, which is about as helpful as a slick tyre on a muddy climb," says Will.

BUT WE THOUGHT ROUTINE WAS GOOD - WHAT GIVES?

Routine is good, superstition bad, apparently. "A general rule of thumb is that superstitions

control us, whereas we control pre-performance routines." Will says. The real dilemma comes with superstitions that cross over the threshold and seem to act as pre-performance routines: try to control them, not the other way round.

BUILD A GOOD ROUTINE

"It's a good thing to develop pre-performance routines to improve our mindset and physical readiness before riding — imagery, self-talk and positive statements," Will says. Try mentally visualising yourself on the trail before riding, or simply say: 'I can do this' before you hit technical sections.

WHAT ARE YOUR PRE-RIDE SUPERSTITIONS?

WEASKED

I always have to put my gear on in the same order from right to left (socks, shoes, knee pads, gloves, etc).

Mike Gamble

once they're in line.

I only ever wear black socks and they have to be at exactly the same height. I always feel much better

Chris Chapman

I always have to have a pre-ride dump precisely 20 minutes before my race run. I'd feel as though something was missing and assume my performance would drop because it's that much of a ritual.

Dan Jones

I always have to do the sign of the cross with my right hand across my body twice before I ride — I'm not even religious!

Dave Hamlet

My Camelbak tube has to be over my left shoulder. I freak out if it's on the right! David Robinson On the morning of race day I have to put a pinch of my dog's hair down my shoes.

I can't have any skin showing above my kneepads. Kyle Farrow



tastes great and also helps provide a slow release of energy to the muscles.

With its chocolate-coated bottom the Honey Stinger could almost pass as a chocolate biscuit. It's not too sickly, and gives your body a real boost. honeystingeruk.co.uk

PowerBar says this special formula provides more energy to the muscles than standard energy bars. This wafer ticks all the right boxes — taste, texture and looks.

powerbar.eu

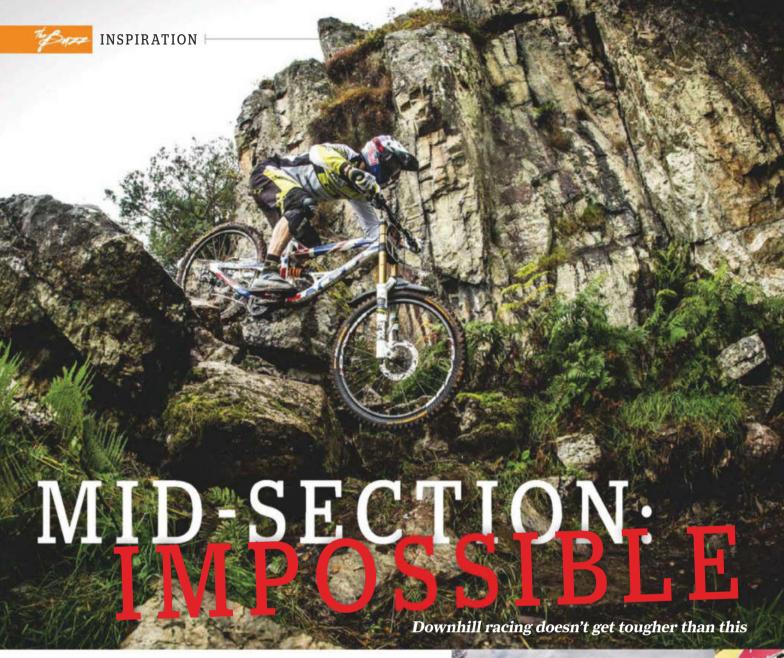
WIGGLE ENERGY BAR £17.99 for 20

It may look like a small energy

bar, but don't be fooled. It's extremely thick - a bit like a KitKat Chunky — which is a little off-putting and makes it hard to consume. Fortunately, it tastes good, not too dissimilar to a fruity cereal bar.

It also contains a hefty 44g of carbohydrates so it will

certainly help refuel the body, and with real fruit pieces and rolled oats, it's low in both fat and salts. The Wiggle bar might not take gold, but it's the best value consumable here.



Dan Atherton has created the world's first unrideable downhill track, crammed with enormous gaps, sketchy plummets and a bonkers 45ft hip jump that proved so gnarly that even brother Gee wasn't hitting it.

Fifteen of the best riders in the world turned up to try their luck at the Red Bull Hardline, a race designed to push downhill to new limits, bringing together steep and techie downhill tracks with freeride jumps.

Set in the Dyfi Valley, in mid-Wales,
Hardline is a race against the clock,
designed and built by Dan Atherton. Red
Bull invites the top 30 world riders to
compete, but coming right after the finish
of the World Cup season, and just
before Rampage, only half
that number turned up. And
by the time racing kicked
off on Sunday, only eight

the many
the ma

your calendar, taking place

October 15-17. Rampage is the

most extreme mtb event on

the planet: freeriders throw

themselves down a cliff in

the Utah desert. Watch

at redbull.com

by the time racing kicked off on Sunday, only eight riders were left in the running — the rest having crashed out or succumbed to the brutal track. Even Dan himself fell victim to his

creation, breaking his shoulder blade after overjumping the huge Renegade hip.

Almost every rider tasted the Welsh mud and slate at some point over the weekend, as rain on practice day made the already challenging course virtually impossible in sections. Taylor Vernon retired after casing a jump and hurting his foot, and eventual winner Ruaridh Cunningham went over the bars on one of the many step-downs.

While the former junior world champ came down fastest, it was Gee Atherton who set the pace all weekend and mentored the riders through the course. Sadly, for the second year running, he flatted just

30 seconds into his run and had to roll down the course on the rim.

For 2016, Red Bull is hoping to boost rider numbers by casting their net wider and offering appearance fees and a bigger prize pot.



DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH

Research reveals that walkers, not mountain bikes, do most damage to trails

MTBS ERODE THE SOIL MORE THAN WALKERS OR HORSES, RIGHT?

Not so, according to scientific research, which says that booted feet and hooves cause more damage. And with Wales beginning a debate on changing the law to let mountain bikers loose on footpaths, we thought it was time to scratch beneath the surface of what really causes soil erosion.

WHAT DOES THE SCIENCE SAY?

The short answer is, not very much. But the little research that has been done suggests wheels do less damage than you'd think. Way back in 1994, John Wilson and Joseph Seney at Montana State University compared erosion from hikers, horses, motorbikes and off-road bikes on Montana trails. They watered the trail to simulate wet weather and each group passed over the ground 100 times. And they found... not much. There was no statistically significant difference between hikers and mountain bikers, but horses and motorcycles did cut up the trail.

Then Aussies Luke Chiu and Lorne Kriwoken conducted a physical impact study in Wellington Park, Tasmania, published in 2013. Again, there was no difference between the level of impacts caused by mountain bikers and walkers.

Finally, Jeff Marion from the US Geological Survey looked at 125km of trail in the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, Tennessee and Kentucky,



comparing equestrian, walking, mtb and ATV trails. And lo and behold, mtb trails had the least erosion, and computer modelling showed they suffered the least soil loss, too. So far so good...

TRAILS IN WALES ARE FAIR GAME, THEN?

Not exactly. Chiu and Kriwoken's Tasmania research also found that when a trail was wet, very steep or riders skidded more, erosion was worse. In fact, water could be the biggest trail destroyer of all, according to the Montana research, eclipsing the impact of either wheels or feet.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

So what are the implications for Right to Roam access and letting mountain bikers share paths with walkers?

Some trails are undoubtedly going to need more maintenance to stave off erosion. Some bridleways might need less maintenance, however, because mountain bikers won't be limited to a fraction of trails and can spread out instead.

Really it's education and signage that's needed most, helping different user groups understand access restrictions and become more tolerant of one another.



WHY AM I...

MUDDIER THAN MY MATES? You finish a ride spattered with crud while your friends look like they've just won the Daz Doorstep Challenge... not fair! Here's how to stay clean

ON YOUR GUARD

What's the problem? The front of my body is spattered with droplets

Solution: Mud-spattering like this is from the front wheel. At slow speeds it peppers your legs but the faster you go, the higher type that projects forward and back from the fork brace. We like the Dfender, £49 from powa-products.com and the Mudhugger Front Race, £23 from themudhugger.co.uk.

What's the problem? I've got the same guard as everyone else but I'm still ending up covered in mud. **Solution:** Clean riders are often skilful riders. That means bunny-hopping puddles, using natural kickers like roots or rocks to gap muddy sections, and manualling and wheelieing through the worst bits. Testing your abilities like this is a great way to spice up flat sections of trail. you're climbing, or just lift the front into the mire — every

TIRED RUBBER

What's the problem? I stay clean on the trails, but get hit by clods when I take to the fire roads.

Solution: Summer tyres with tight, close-fitting lugs pick up mud and hold onto it. This is released when your speed picks up on fire roads. Try a as you roll onwards — you'll get more grip too. We've got a full buyer's guide to tyres online at po.st/TyreGuide, but here's the spoiler: the specialized concept store.co.uk is our favourite light

PERSONAL SPACE

What's the problem? I'm getting hammered with mud trying to follow my friend's lines.

Solution: Following close puts you in the firing line of your buddy's back wheel. The trouble is, if you back off too far you'll lose their lines and maybe even get dropped. But you only need to leave an extra couple of feet to stay clean. really are the best. Dropping back will let you see if they take slow or clumsy lines, and you'll be able to change yours in time





HELMETS OF THE FUTURE Weightless, bomb-proof, snug, smart, cheap, unbreakable with built-in air con. This ideal helmet may not exist yet... but it could do soon

Dozens of scientists around the world are working to make better lids. In California (where else?) they're synthesising the shell of the mantis shrimp because it withstands impacts at 10,000 Gs. Elsewhere, the Swiss national lab for materials science reckons fibres left from making carrot juice can reinforce the outer skin.

Then there's a veggie-free improvement for the foam liner from Bolton University, where scientists believe you'd get better protection with weird new materials called auxetics. Instead of getting thinner when stretched, like rubber does, auxetics get thicker to keep your cranium safe.

Wouldn't it be great if you didn't have to replace your hard hat after a single bump? The squished foam liner can't absorb a second blow. However, a new honeycomb bounces back as good as new, say materials scientists. "This technology in future helmets could reduce or even prevent many of the blunt-force injuries

we see today," says Professor Carolyn Conner Seepersad at the University of Texas, Austin.

How do you know your helmet has actually suffered damage though? University of Washington boffins have made chemicals to add to the shell that change colour according to the power of the impact, like a vivid scar.

Getting a well-fitting helmet in the first place isn't always easy. That's because helmet makers have relied on inaccurate 'average head' models to specify the sizes and shapes of their products. Now new ways of measuring heads mean better typical shapes can be made. German scientists scanned the heads of more than 6,000 volunteers, measuring 40 separate points on each cranium, to come up with five new bog-standard average bonce shapes.

Frames are getting stiffer, suspension is getting smoother, tyres are getting grippier... but we're still not crashing any less. Thank God the eggheads are on the case - keep it up, profs.





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NEED TO

 Updated version of Santa Cruz's best-selling trail bike
 New geometry, VPP suspension and spec
 Carbon frames available in flagship CC guise and heavier C version

Santa Cruz's best-selling trail bike gets a makeover with improved suspension and geometry

ot long ago, an 'affordable'
Santa Cruz Bronson, built with
cheaper and heavier carbon,
passed through our doors. But
unfortunately this 'C' model
didn't exactly light a fire in our bellies.
Disregarding the way the spec had been
compromised to hit the price point, we
never really found a suspension set-up that
delivered good grip and support, and we
couldn't get comfortable or confident with
the conservative sizing.

The guys at Santa Cruz seem to agree with us, because the version-two Bronson squares up to both these criticisms and sends them packing — and the end result is a bike that's all the better for it.

Much more than a trickle-down, the flow of both features and attitude from the Nomad could be better described as a torrent. Not only does the new Bronson get a Nomad-shadowing silhouette — with the upper link now attached to the top tube — it also gets more aggressive geometry and toned-down VPP suspension.

By adding, on average, 25mm to the reach measurement, the Bronson no longer feels cramped, and it's a whole lot more confident when you start twisting the throttle. This extra stability is further improved by a one-degree reduction in the head angle and a 5mm drop in BB height. To complete the package of geometry changes, Santa Cruz has snipped 6mm off





All Santa Cruz suspension bikes use a system called **VPP**, or Virtual Pivot Point. The unique feature of VPP is the two counter-rotating links — one between the bottom bracket and the swingarm, and one connecting the swingarm to the shock and the front triangle. By changing the length. angle and location of the links, Santa Cruz can tune the axle path



and suspension feel. The new Bronson gets the third-generation VPP design, and it gives a far more consistent seat-of-the-pants sensation as it moves through its travel. Santa Cruz has also tidied up the lower link, tucking it into a recess in the seat tube, and made it less vulnerable to rock strikes. Still present are the grease ports for ease of maintenance.

the chainstay length, by moving to a wider, 148mm dropout spacing, and straightened up the seat tube for improved climbing.

Previous VPP designs have exhibited a 'hammocky' feel, whereby the suspension naturally wants to fall into the middle of the travel. Changes introduced on the Nomad eliminated this, giving a more consistent progression from the sag point. It's this

It now rides like a mini-Nomad. It's immensely rewarding

third-generation VPP configuration that's now standard on the Bronson, and allied to the Fox Float X shock (with EVOL can) the result is greatly simplified set-up, the ability to run a much wider range of sag, no more quirkiness and also much improved smallbump sensitivity.

The new Bronson is not only the spitting image of its big brother; it now actually rides a lot like a mini-Nomad. Sure, it can get pin-balled around on real chundery trails, and the suspension performance on square-edge hits can leave your feet slapping around a bit on the pedals, but this new Bronson feels immensely rewarding to ride fast and aggressively. It's agile, lively and responsive, and it pedals with such efficiency that it renders any compression platform redundant.

One thing does remain from the old Bronson, however, and that's the pricing. Don't expect to get much change from five grand for a low-spec CC bike, or £4k for the 280g heavier C frame adorned with a decent spec. Such is the brand's popularity, though, that even at these prices, we doubt you'll be assured of exclusivity on the trails.

Danny Milner

SPECIFICATION Frame Carbon CC.

150mm travel

Size ridden L

Seat angle 74° BB height 341mm Chainstay 432mm

Rider height 5ft 10in Head angle 66°

Front centre 757mm

Wheelbase 1,189mm

Down tube 705mm

Top tube 618mm

Reach 445mm

Shock Fox Float X Factory Fork RockShox Pike, RCT3 Solo Air, 150mm travel Wheels Industry Nine Torch hubs, ENVE M60 rims, Maxxis Minion DHR 2 TR 27.5x2.3in tyres Drivetrain Race Face Next SL carbon crank, SRAM XX1 shifter and r-mech Brakes SRAM Guide Ultimate, 180mm Components Santa Cruz carbon bar 800mm Faston Haven stem. RockShox Reverb Stealth Weight 12.26kg (27.04lb) Sizes S, M, L, XL



Real improvements to sizing, handling and suspension. Looks and rides like a mini-Nomad.

Cable routing optimised for rear brake on the right. Ugly front mech mount. Those prices.



- Cannondale's latest 120mm bike blends XC race with aggressive trail
- Single-pivot suspension uses a carbon rocker link and flex in the carbon seatstays to save weight
- Flat brakemount borrowed from Cannondale road bike tech neatly hides the rear caliper on the chainstay

annondale's brand new Habit brings conventional trail bike wisdom to a short-travel, lightweight package. With 27.5in wheels, and 120mm of travel. combined with a wide 760mm bar and short stem as standard, it's a fast, capable machine that ticks all the right boxes.

Typically, the Habit 1 comes come packed with Cannondale's proprietary features, including the signature one-legged Lefty fork. You also get a snazzy remote lock-out system for both the RockShox shock and Lefty fork. The Habit frame looks simple and clean cut, but carefully manipulated carbon seatstays do away with the need for pivots - saving weight and reducing maintenance.

Cannondale has also done a lot of work on the fork. As usual, the Carbon Leftv is super stiff, and the revised 2.0 model has great control and damping, making it very impressive for a 120mm unit. The rear suspension on the Habit rides poppy and tight — even with the shock in the full open setting it's easy to stomp out your power without energy loss. In fact, the Habit is so fast on the gas, that the remote lockout only really reduces grip and adds harshness. We reckon it would be better off without.

The bike is well-balanced and, with its stiff carbon chassis, you can chuck it around the trail and be rewarded with instant responses to shifts in body weight. However, the CZero carbon wheels are clad in a skinny Rocket Ron rear tyre, with a thin



casing, that makes the bike feel overly edgy and you can get out of shape in the blink of a eye if you're not 100 per cent focused.

There's no denying that the Habit Carbon 1 delivers a fast, capable bike with a distinct XC bias, but Cannondale hasn't ignored the out-and-out trail rider either - the SE version sports 10mm more travel up front, slacker steering geometry and much meatier tyres. All of which should mean that you'll be able to milk the chassis' playful suspension pop and manoeuvrability, and relax your grip a little bit more on the descents. We're keen to get one on test soon.

Mick Kirkman

Stiff and agile speed machine that blends trail angles with XC capability. Climbs like a demon. Front suspension is well damped and supportive.

With carbon hoops, sketchy tyres and a solid chassis, it can be a white-knuckle ride. Not sold on the Lefty's increased fork offset (and subsequently twitchier steering).







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NEED TO KNOW

130mm-travel trail ripper with 650b wheels
 Dedicated 1x11 frame design with wider-stance main pivot for improved stiffness
 New 148x12mm dropouts for stronger rear wheel
 All four frame sizes have been made longer for 2016

Whyte's new single-chainring bike is so well-sorted it's begging for a more aggressive fork and tyres

rom linkage forks to adjustable travel, Whyte has always been at the pointy end of product development. More recently, it's been pushing the geometry and sizing envelope with longer, slacker bikes, but what really sets it apart from the crowd are its dedicated SCR (single chainring) frame designs.

Whyte hasn't just removed the front mech mount and cable guides to save weight. It's using the space previously occupied by the front mech to increase the width of the main pivot and boost frame stiffness. SCR was first introduced on Whyte's top-end models, but the advent of more affordable 1x11 drivetrains now sees the SCR concept trickle down the price range. The latest model to benefit from the stiffer frame and uncluttered design is the T-130 S, a 130mm-travel trail bike designed for speed.

To that end, the T-130 S also gets a wider 148x12mm Boost rear end to improve wheel strength, while the front triangle, on all four frame sizes, has grown by 20mm for increased stability. To keep the 760mm bars within comfortable reach, 40mm stems grace the S and M, with 50mm versions on L and XI

So the sizing, geometry and styling are sorted. Taking into account the spec, and the fact that it's sold through a traditional dealer network, the T-130 S is competitively priced, too. But what about the rear suspension? This is one area where Whyte has previously fallen short — the rear end on the T-129 providing a stable but rather lifeless ride. No such criticism can be levied at the T-130 S. The rear end feels supple, supportive and sprightly. Combined with the increased frame stiffness, and slack

66.1-degree head angle, the T-130 S is a total ripper. It's definitely one of those bikes that makes you want to hang it out from the get-go — the only problem being that you reach the limits of WTB Trail Boss tyres and the spindly Revelation fork so much sooner than you hope. Neither, however, would be an issue if it weren't for the Whyte's goading raw speed.

Alan Muldoon



1ST IMPRESSION

HIGHS

Balanced suspension response, sleek frame design and equally smooth ride quality.

LOWS

The only limiting factors on the T-130 S are the WTB Trail Boss front tyre and the stiffness of the Revelation fork.







NEED TO KNOW

New vertical-flex frame design for more comfortable seated ride
 Ultra-wide Boost hubs create stiffer, stronger wheels
 Carbon frame, with internal cable routing for clean lines
 Size-specific wheels: 15.5in gets 27.5in, bigger sizes roll on 29in

Sleek, modern hardtail with softtail seating for comfy climbing

rek's brand new
Procaliber hardtail
is an absolute beast
on the climbs. Its
stiff frame delivers
a stack of power to the rear
wheel while still managing
to feel comfortable and
'squishy' through the
saddle. The 'stiff yet
compliant' cliché has
actually been realised here.



Smartly, Trek has built a load of vertical compliance into the seat tube, letting the bike flex a little as you ride — up to 11mm of vertical movement. The system is called IsoSpeed Decoupler, initially developed by Trek for its road and cyclo-cross bikes.

The seat tube and top tube are 'decoupled'— although they're still connected by two bearings and a bushing, with the join covered by a rubber seal. You really can feel it doing its job too— or rather, you experience none of the harsh impacts you usually feel on a hardtail. The big, 2.2in tyres and wide rims may well be part of that effect, allowing me to run 24psi in the rear and softening things up further, but it's still an impressively fast ride.

By the time it came to go downhill, I'd been thoroughly lulled into a false sense of security by the fast climb. The IsoSpeed system affects how the bike feels only when you're sitting down, and doesn't give the bike any compliance when you're standing on the pedals. It's not a harsh ride by any stretch — the Reba fork feels good, and clunk-free, and the bike's stiffness means it's really precise and solid.

We like the ultra-wide Boost 148 back end and Boost 110 front

hub, as they mean the 29er wheels feel really stiff. And we like Trek's Control Freak Cable Management: a neat way to tidy up the cables inside the frame, with entry and exit ports plus a cinch point to stop them rattling. The SRAM GX 1x11 drivetrain is spot-on too; the only thing that's wrong here is a daft 100mm-long stem. Then again, it is an XC race bike!

Jamie Darlow

CDECIEICATION

Frame OCLV Mountain Carbon, IsoSpeed Decoupler

Fork RockShox Reba RL, Solo Air, 100mm travel

Wheels Bontrager Boost 110/148 hubs, Bontrager Mustang Elite rims, Bontrager XR1 Expert 29x2.2in tyres

Drivetrain SRAM GX 11-speed

Brakes Shimano Deore, 180/160mm

Components Bontrager Weight 11.29kg (24.89lb) Sizes 15.5, 17.5, 18.5, 19.5, 21.5in

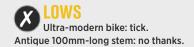
GEOMETRY

Size ridden 19.5in Rider height 6ft 1in Head angle 68.9° Seat angle 70.2° BB height 317mm Chainstay 431mm Front centre 726mm Wheelbase 1,157mm Down tube 719mm Top tube 638mm Reach 442mm



1ST IMPRESSION

HIGHS
Stiff, light, fast, and the IsoSpeed
system really seems to work when seated.





The Habit delivers the best kind of MTB performance - pure, simple, idiot-grin fun! Composed and capable enough to run with bigger-travel bikes, yet light and lively enough to put the hurt on the leg shavers, we could have called it the "Sweet Spot." If you're looking for one bike to do it all, pick up a Habit.

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- BIKE RADAR ***



REAL WORLD RIDING

Dan Trent just wants to ride — but life keeps getting in the way

A new start

Dan sets out to reinvent himself as a friendlier rider

oving to a new area should be a chance to reinvent yourself. You know, finally escape the shackles of previous misdemeanours. Banish those regrets. Forge a whole new identity.

In riding terms, I've been trying to ingratiate Team Trent into the riding gang whose path I literally crossed one Wednesday night ride not long after moving to the area. For me, this means portraying riding to Mrs T not as 'me time' on the bike but in fact selfless dedication to networking and building new circles of friends.

She's not daft, and doesn't believe a word of it. But I'll milk it as long as I can. And I have found her a new riding buddy among the gang, who's taken her out for a more sensible 'Welcome to West Yorkshire' ride — as in, it didn't involve stupid death-steep gradients, moss-covered rocks, dead-ends, gorge scrambles over barbed wire and ridiculous 'wall of cobbles' climbs like our first attempt the other week.

Anyway. Riding with a new group gives me a chance to attempt to create a new Dan, one that isn't known as a reckless have-a-go hero. One who doesn't get 'a bit carried away' with banging elbows on the descents, forgetting it's meant to be a sociable ride, not the Megavalanche. One who doesn't take stupid risks just for a chance of a bit of KoM-gloating during the post-ride beers. One capable of completing a ride without ambition spectacularly triumphing over ability, and another trip to A&E.

So, I've (almost) exclusively been riding the old Five over the various fancier, more on-trend bikes lurking in the cellar. I've worn old kit so as not to come across as some flash southern git - no open-face/goggles nonsense, just 'sensible' riding clothes with no great statements of intent in terms of body armour. I've even held back from buzzing tyres with the route leaders on the descents and bitten my tongue when tempted to give it the full 'of course, when I was in Whistler...' chest-beating. And, of course, I've kept schtum about my minor supporting role on the pages of this celebrated publication.

Yet it's completely failed. I was out for a ride with my new compadre trying



Meet the new Dan. Same as the old Dan.

not to sound too desperate (or cocky) as I underlined my riding credentials and those of Mrs T too. "You don't write a column in **mbr** do you?" he eventually asked. "Actually I do," I stammered, flattered. "I thought it was you. I knew I'd heard that stuff before somewhere." Well, there's only so much material...

The whole attempt not to come across like some death-or-glory idiot seems to have failed completely too. Out on a ride with aforementioned new pal and his boss, we'd battled across a windswept moor in the rain for what I'd consider a definitive Yorkshire riding experience.

Finally we reached the top of a descent, a treacherous-looking one packed with rocks, wheel-sized holes, ditches and all manner of peril. Take it steady, Dan, no showing off now. You're a guest, this is their ride, let them go first and prove you can ride with maturity and humility.

There was a sigh from my two new riding buddies, one of whom I'd met just an hour before. "Right, you'd better go first, you'll only come screaming past like a lunatic if you don't. And we'll know what line NOT to take."

Meet the new Dan. He's the same as the old Dan.



Illustration by Chris Watson



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BURN Again Rider

After years off the bike, veteran mtb snapper Geoff Waugh has caught the bug again

Fred the shred

When forgetful ride mates drive you to trailside violence

ot tears of anger and frustration rolled down my face as we travelled down another blind alley, forced to retrace our tracks and add more empty miles to our journey. We were lost. Our planned ride was a 50-mile route that took in some big climbs, yet, full of confidence and buoyed with a childlike sense of adventure, we hadn't even considered time.

Pedalling out from the car park, after the obligatory half-hour faff, typical cyclists' banter filled the air. Baiting each other, taking the rise out of each other's bikes, clothes, helmets and riding skill, or lack thereof. All the things that are necessary fare in the bonding game between men. Oh, and one of our party was 45 minutes late. Well over an hour of precious time had been wasted before we even put tension through a chain. No one noticed.

We rolled out into the beautiful late September sun. It was a so-called Indian summer and the whole of the country was intent on making the most of the mini heatwave. Maybe that's why our mate was late. Who knows? The trails were unseasonably dusty as we tackled the first calf-cramping, nose-on-the-stem climb away from the valley.

We gathered at the top to catch our breath, wait for stragglers and survey the view. One down and the first great descent beckoned. It was long and sinewy, with hip-swinging corners and enough rock fields to keep the most masochistic dirt biker in rapture.

Halfway down, Fred (we'll call him that because that's what suits) shouted, "Flat." It was a rear wheel snakebite as he had bulldozed through a rocky section. We pulled over. "Anyone got a tube?" he asked, with no sense of shame. Between the three of us we had two tubes. I was running tubeless and had some kind of weird belief punctures were a thing of the past, but the old schooler part of me carried a tube anyway. Our other friend also had one, which was sacrificed to the better cause of getting us mobile again.

And so we rode on. Caning it wherever the trail let us, taking risks that are part and parcel of group riding. Cackling deliriously at various close calls and falling silent on every climb; letting the sweetest



Desperately, I tried filling the tyre with grass

pain flow through our legs and lungs. Then the inevitable; we drew to a stop at the top of a small rise and heard the sudden outrush of air as a tyre collapsed. Our friend again. No more tubes.

By now the autumn sun was failing fast. None of us had lights — never dreamt we'd need them — and we still had miles to cover. Big smiles had turned into concerned frowns. We put a spurt on, trying to outride the sun. Ever done that? It's impossible. On the last descent it was my turn to flat, tearing a sidewall in my front tyre that no amount of sealant could heal. I cursed my luck. The darkness slowly cloaked us as we stumbled blindly down the trail, each of us blaming the other. Desperately, I tried filling the tyre with grass; no dice. And I wasn't about

to shred an expensive rim on those rocks.

Before long none of us had any idea where we were. We could see car lights and got down to a road where we limped and shoved along the path, using car headlights to see our way. Our lack of lights on the unlit road made it a perilous affair; we thought death was just a bypassing lorry away. I was bricking it!

Eventually we found our cars. With sighs of relief and cries of never again and swearing to bring more tubes and lights than a cycling superstore, we packed everything away. Then came an exclamation from our 'friend'. "Hey lads, I found a tube at the bottom of my pack after all! In unison we pulled our pumps from our packs and beat the man to within an inch of his life. He deserved it.





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□ Immen. CUR\ Ltd 2014 SSN 1867 0824.
Printed by Polestar. Registered at the Post Office as a newspaper.
mbr's published 13 times a year on every fourth Wednesday. If you have trouble finding an issue at your newspents, please call Distribution on 020 3148 3333.
mbr incorporating Mountain Biker International, Bicycle Magazine, Performanc Cyclist and The Bike Mag, a part of Time Inc. (UK), is published 13 times a year on every fourth Wednesday of each month by Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 OSU.





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HAMSTERLEY BACKLASH Having only just received my copy

of October's issue of mbr. I am surprised and disappointed to find the first thing that's inspired me is the need to respond to a letter by John Patterson entitled 'Trail Fail'.

As someone who runs the volunteer dig day team, Patterson's derisory review of Hamsterley is, in my experience, becoming an all too familiar sentiment expressed by a growing number of 'mountain bikers'. Google any trail and I guarantee a forum page will pop up with views on why it's all going horribly wrong.

What Patterson needs to appreciate is that funding for trails, not only creation, but regular maintenance, is very hard to come by, particularly in times of austerity such as these.

Trail centres cannot provide or maintain trails without volunteers; it's a simple but inescapable fact. I'm pleased to say volunteers up and down the country want to be involved and put something back, not because they feel they owe something to their local trail, but



perhaps they owe something to the lifestyle they lead or the sport they simply can't get enough of. They give their time freely and work very hard for some appreciation from their local community, and I am immensely proud of my team who have created new features and maintained old, with nothing but hand tools and whacker plates.

What disappoints is stinging criticism cooked up with little or no experience of funding, design, land management and forest industry cycles, then shared without a thought to the effort put in at grassroots level.

Good luck Hamsterley, pick your lines and stick to them.

Neil Barnes

GREAT SCOT

The Cowal Peninsula is without doubt the most underused and understated piece of stunning countryside on our shores, as a mountain biking destination.

It boasts countless miles of forest roads, with much of the timber felled offering the most incredible panoramic views of the Clyde, the Holy Loch and summit views to Ben Lomond, Arran, Jura, Islay and the Kyles of Bute, and that's just the scenery!

Cowal MTB club has recently become an affiliated club with a growing membership, allowing us to develop biking further in our community and reach out to new members and encourage more people into biking We have singletrack that is second to none, and forestry tracks for all levels, and are continually building more.

Our long-term aim is a quality trail network that can be maintained and enjoyed by all.

At present it is a hidden gem, only an hour from Scotland's central belt.

We have hosted a few races in the past couple of years, with all visitors being very impressed, including No Fuss Events, who are running an enduro here next month.

We are also bidding to bring a round of Scottish XC and a round of Scottish POC Enduro to Cowal next year.

All of this will help raise awareness for this area and increase visitor numbers.

Maybe you could come and ride around our backyard and see its beauty for yourself? I'm sure many of our members who read your magazine would love to see their backyard featured.

Alasdair Marshal

Ed - Sounds like a plan!

FAMILY FORTUNES

On our way to Cyprus this year, knowing that my eight-year-old was going to get a new mountain bike for his birthday, we bought the August edition of mbr for a little light reading.



Well, the best bit had to be your Easy Route of Derwent Valley in the Peak District, not too far from our base in Stockport. The map was clear and the directions meant we didn't get lost. As it was our first expedition into the unknown, we felt it was best to stick with easy, and it proved the right choice.

The two major climbs brought differing fortunes, as the first one came soon into the ride, and was managed by both. The second climb away from Ladybower towards Whinstone Lee Tor proved a little more difficult for me, and eventually my lad had to push in places. We got to the top of this climb, and were spoilt by the track as well as the views before descending.

It was a great day out, with lots of laughs and great weather. We found the conditions testing, but manageable, and found a great new way to spend more hours together. Bring on the next ride out.

Craig Davy

MAINEY IN YORKSHIRE

I have just read this month's magazine (October edition) and am very interested in the trails Sim Mainey rode in and around the Huddersfield area

Do you have any downloadable maps/ gpx routes available so I can look to add some different routes to my current trails? I live in Holmfirth on the outskirts of Huddersfield and regularly ride around my local area but am always looking for other trails to link up to. It would be great if I could find even more great trails to ride. Mark Chambers

Ed - We reckon you should head down to Magic Rock brewery and buy Sim a pint in return for some local knowledge!

MIND THE GAP

While in Les Gets in the Alps, where I have been mountain biking with my wife for

about 10 years, I saw two helicopter rescues for riders who had not made it across gap jumps. The second one looked very bad for the unlucky rider.

I have to ask, why do we need gaps? Yes, I know that they are normally marked, but at the speed we travel, we can't always see them. Especially if they have they been removed or fallen over.

It's a macho thing I suppose. I have now found that, at my local trails in Hampshire, people are digging gaps in jumps that you could just roll over before. These trails are used by kids of all ages and if they suddenly ride down the track and they don't know someone has dug a gap with no warning. someone could get hurt. So it's OK to build jumps, but please no gaps.

Robin Gravestock

Ed — I'm not sure gaps are the real problem here. Yes it's wrong to modify popular trails and dig coffin holes for people to fall into, but surely there's also an onus on the individual to check out a trail feature before committing to it? Do we dumb down trails for the masses, or do we try to educate riders to think for themselves and understand that trails are constantly evolving?

OLD BUT GOLD

I read the recent article in the September issue with a wry grin.

Old bloke that I am, I was riding softtail mountain bikes back in the early Nineties. Do you remember the Pro-Flex range of bikes? Elastomer at the rear and either a Flex-stem up front, or Girvin forks with another elastomer. Those Girvin forks still look cool today.

I restored an old Pro Flex last year and it's a hoot to ride. Nothing close to a modern bike, but fun all the same. It all goes in cycles I guess...

Justin Roe

BELL RING

l just thought I'd let you know about my crash.

It happened last week while riding off-piste in Chicksands Woods, Bedfordshire. Good news is that my Giant Trance survived and my recently purchased Bell Super 2.0 helmet was thoroughly crash tested. It saved my head from a trip to the

Bad news is that I managed to snap the big bone in my forearm, which needed a plate and pins.

The wife says I'm too old for mountain biking. I just think it means it's time to invest in a dropper seatpost! Dan Kent

OLD BLOKES WHO SHOULD KNOW BET

In association with Broken Riders, brokenriders.com

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WHO Benjamin Williams WHERE Brechfa. Wales WHEN August 2015 HOW Fractured both bones in lower left arm - one came through the skin!



WHO Matt Crowther WHERE Danbury. Essex WHEN July 2015 HOW Caught by the pedal after foot slipped off, but carried on to do 12 more miles! Needed three stitches and two lots of antibiotics



WHO Dan Turner WHERE Enfield Jumps WHEN July 2015 HOW Turns out jumping a 2008 Specialized Rockhopper over BMX iumps isn't a great idea.



WHO James Rattigan WHERE West Yorkshire WHEN August 2015 HOW Lost control after a very small jump to find myself on a collision course with a silver birch tree. Took a selfie after waking up!





Every day, **mbr**'s forum is awash with advice, stories and gossip. Here's what

What's your best bike

If it moves and shouldn't, use duct tape, if it doesn't move and should. use WD-40.

Seasicksteve

I cut my thumb quite badly while removing a jumper from a woman's cassette. But with some gaffer tape off my mini-pump, and some sweat wipes from my pocket, I was on the move again within minutes!

Steve_sordy

A tip for any long jouneys to trail centres. Carry a pair of tights in case your fan belt breaks. If the worst happens put them on and flag down a pervert lorry driver for a lift.

Recently had the brake padsecuring pin disappear out of the front Deore caliper on the commuter bike and watched it bounce down a drain. Nipped into New Look (no hardware-style shop nearby) and procured a hairpin, fitted perfectly. It's still in there. DaMilkyBarKid

Gaffer tape malt loaves to your bars for endurance riding nutrition.

Yeti Pilot

Riding Long Mynd and a mate's tubeless split. I cut up a plastic bottle to make a sleeve in the tyre so tube didn't bulge out.

Dave_Rollinson

In a race with 80km still to go, I filled a brake reservoir with water from my backpack as oil had leaked out due to a loose screw. Bit of pumping and the front brake worked again.

Illya Rudkin

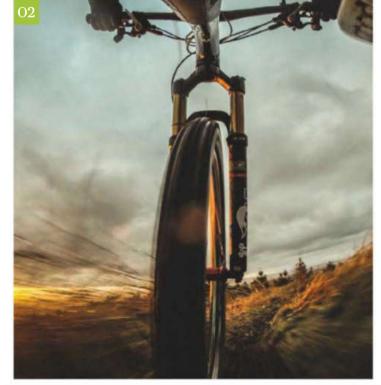
Stuffing my tyre with grass after getting a puncture and discovering I had forgot to pack my repair kit. Rob Dawson

NEXT MONTH

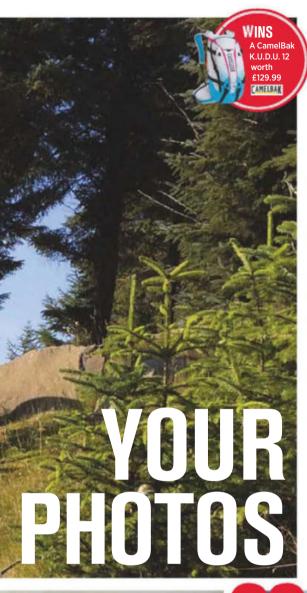
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O1 Beckie Davis enjoying the Scottish air at Glentress.

Photo: Paul Davis

O2 GoPro time-lapse from Captain Cook's monument.

Photo: Chris Bell

O3 Nice weather for ducks.
Photo: Rob Tulloch

Canyon Strive in the Torridon mountains.

Photo: Chris Grenfall

The 'Ard Rock enduro living up to its name.

Photo: John Horner



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DEMONDAYS

When you've tasted dirt too many times it's all too easy to play it safe, so what's the best way to exorcise the ghosts of crashes past? We head to Antur Stiniog, North Wales's downhill trail centre, to face our fears

Words and photos: Sim Mainey





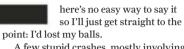


TRAIL A BOUT THE SERIES

Trail centres were invented right here in the UK. No other country has such an extensive network of artfully crafted trails, from Glentress in the borders of Scotland down to Queen Elizabeth Country Park in the heart of the South Downs. And with no two trail centres alike, we're making it our mission to bring you the best of manmade singletrack in the country. From the newest trails that flow like water to the old, rocky legacies of the 90s, every trail and trail centre has a story to tell. There's a broad depth of quality to be enjoyed by everyone, whether you're after a quick half-hour fix or an all-day ride.







A few stupid crashes, mostly involving pulling the right-hand chicken stick when I shouldn't, had seen me retreating deep into my comfort zone and becoming reacquainted with my riding demons. Rather than taking on anything new or challenging I was sticking to familiar trails with their tried and trusted lines, playing it safe.

Don't get me wrong — it wasn't like I was some kind of freeride god before all of this, but I definitely felt my ability to get my head around technical downhills had taken a bit of a battering, along with my ego, and I wasn't happy about it.

They say the first step to recovery is to admit you have a problem. After getting back from one particular ride where I just couldn't get down the hill without clenching my right hand involuntarily, I'd ough. I know there was something wrong.

had enough. I knew there was something wrong, and I knew I had to tackle it head on.

GOING UP

Despite admitting to myself I had a problem, I didn't want to go as far as admitting it to anyone else. So, while going on a skills course with an instructor would be an obvious first step back to ball-ownership, I thought I'd try and sort my head out with some self-medication. I decided I needed a day of riding unfamiliar trails, the kind that would force me to face my weaknesses and leave nowhere to hide. I needed to book myself onto an uplift.

With five trails of varying difficulty all accessible by a van uplift, Antur Stiniog seemed to be the perfect place to tackle some personal demons. To give me a bit more of an edge, or rather confidence, I packed a full-face helmet, plenty of body armour and a long-travel bike I'd

ANTUR STINIOG SEEMED TO BE THE PERFECT PLACE TO TACKLE SOME PERSONAL DEMONS







ANTUR IS MORE LIKE A BIKE PARK THAN A TRAIL CENTRE, AND THE GRADINGS ARE ADJUSTED ACCORDINGLY

borrowed from a friend. I also brought Dan, mostly because I needed someone to egg me on/pick me up off the floor, depending on how it went.

Antur Stiniog's visitor centre sits above the town of Blaneau Ffestiniog in North Wales. Despite being slap-bang in the middle of the Snowdonia National Park, the town and the surrounding area aren't part of it. It's possible that the officers at the National Parks committee decided that gutted mountains with their slate entrails sprawled across the valley weren't quite in keeping with typical ideas of beauty and conservation. But though the mining-ravaged landscape appears quite brutal, the rugged mountains transformed into heaps of slate, it's actually quite beautiful in its own apocalyptic way.

Trail centres are sometimes seen as an easy option. You have to really try to properly scare yourself, the trails are consistent in all weather conditions, and you can get round them on any old bike. But Antur Stiniog really isn't like that at all. For a start, Antur is more like a bike park than a trail centre, and the gradings are adjusted accordingly. The blue trail is certainly the easiest, but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be treated with respect. If you are a trail centre stalwart then proceed with caution — you might need to adjust your expectations.

The wind is whipping harshly into our faces as we pull our bikes from the trailer. Behind us, people in red jumpsuits and white helmets clip into harnesses and disappear, screaming, down a zip wire that stretches across the valley and down to a point hidden away among the piles of slate. Seems

this is the place to get your kicks, bike-related or otherwise.

Being sensible folk (mostly), Dan and I decide to warm up with the blue trail, stretching out muscles that are stiff from the drive and giving me a chance to get acquainted with my borrowed bike. But what follows is not pretty as we wobble, skid and generally make a mess of getting down the hill. We figure that having got one horrendous run out of the way we can find our groove and start riding like people who actually know what they're doing. We lash the bikes to the trailer and hop back in the van.

FIRST CUT

Hssssssssss. Yup, that's definitely a puncture.

We stand and stare impotently at Dan's tyre as it burbles white sealant onto the trail, both of us hoping it will somehow heal itself, like tubeless tyres are supposed to. That is until we see that the new-that-day tyre has been sliced open by Welsh slate in two places. We're a third of the way through the descent and, being downhillers for the day, neither of us is riding with any spares, so it's a roll back down to the car park on the rim to see what can be done.

This is one of the occasions where not having mega-long runs is a definite plus — even with a flat rear tyre it doesn't take too long to drop back down to the car and wrestle an inner tube into place. The uplift van comes and goes as we faff around with rubber and pumps. Rather than sit around twiddling our latex-covered thumbs waiting for the next uplift we spend 15 minutes playing on



the jump line that they've managed to squeeze between the visitor centre and the road.

Stood back at the top of the hill, I take a few moments looking at the other riders and bikes we're sharing the mountain with. A box-fresh downhill bike sits next to an old hardtail complete with frame bag and what are probably its original tyres, now quite bald. Troy Lee full-facers jostle next to battered peakless helmets that probably should have been retired a long time ago. It's fair to say there's a real mix of kit and abilities here today. The majority of bikes are 140mm full-suspension bikes with riders, much like me, clad in unfamiliar levels of padding and protection to push their limits a little.

The downhill bikes all head towards the black run, which starts next to a sign that reads 'Red Bull Personal Best.' The idea is that you time yourself on this run and then compare yourself to the likes of Gee and Rachel Atherton. I'm not ready for that level of demotivation quite yet, so we decide to take on the red trail instead.











HARD ROCK

After the smooth, twisty flow of the blue, the red is a bit of a shock. The trail cuts through the grassy side of the hill and then straight across, or down, sections of wet, raw rock. There are enough sharp edges and awkward gaps to take your front wheel where you'd rather it didn't go and put holes in your tyres.

Dan is now riding with a definite lightness, the fear of another puncture playing heavily on his mind. I'm starting to get warmed up - the bike feels more familiar, I now know how much grip to expect from the tyres and trail, and I'm beginning to enjoy myself. For a moment I'm in that magical zone where things just happen, seemingly without my input. The bike and I go exactly where we need to go, everything is effortless and speed just comes. I loft the front wheel over a rock section with my eyes on the next corner when I get a sensory kick back into reality. The front wheel has cleared the rocks but the rear has made contact with the wet slate and stepped a foot sideways. Adrenaline kicks in as the bike slews sideways mid-air. I instinctively grab the back brake, which makes things worse on landing. I'm on for a real tank slapper. Somehow, the part of my brain that was once used to help fight off lions and other prehistoric threats does a good job of stepping in. Accumulated knowledge and instinct see me through the danger. This is what I came here for. I got myself into trouble, I scared myself and I dealt with it. I can do this stuff.

It's the final uplift of the day and I can tell I'm sharing the van with the Spectre of the Last Run. To even acknowledge its presence is a guaranteed



THIS IS WHAT I CAME HERE FOR. I GOT MYSELF INTO TROUBLE, I SCARED MYSELF AND I DEALT WITH IT. I CAN DO THIS STUFF

way of ruining the day — it means an almost certain crash or terminal mechanical. Never make eye contact with the Spectre of the Last Run.

In truth I've probably pushed my luck for today already. New trails on an unfamiliar bike were always going to be a gamble, but we've both survived so far. I'm determined to make this run down in one piece — mostly because there's no way I'm letting Dan drive my car back home.

Despite my earlier adrenaline hit, I'm now riding more cautiously than I'd like. My arms are getting tired and I'm overthinking things. Time to back off slightly and get down the hill; the Spectre is hanging on my back wheel along with

my demons and I'm trying to shake them both. There's a sense of relief as I hit the last corner, bike and body intact, but also a bit of disappointment that I can't go back up for another go. I've spotted a line I'd like to try... but it's probably for the best that I can't.

My trip to Antur Stiniog hasn't shaken all my demons from my back wheel but it's been the perfect first step on the trail to recovery. It's also been a lot of fun, and that's half the battle. If you've become a bit jaded, a little wary of pushing yourself or just need a bit of a quick adrenaline fix, then Antur Stiniog is the place to get yourself back in the game.







ANTUR STINIOG

THE TRAILS

- DOUBLE BLACK Y Du
- BLACK Black Powder
- RED Wild Cart
- BLUE 'Drafft'
- (some red sections)
- BLUE Jympa

- Davis Sympa

PICK OF THE TRAILS The red has enough

to thrill you without the penalty for failure that comes with the black. Ride once to get your eye in... then let rip on the second run.

THE CENTRE

The visitor centre is fully equipped with showers, changing rooms and a cafe.

Uplifts run from 10am-4pm and a pass is £27.50 midweek and £29.50 at the weekends. On-the-day bookings are possible but they aren't guaranteed and it's always advisable to reserve your spot well in advance. anturstiniog.com/Booking/

SLEEPING AND EATING

Blaneau Ffestiniog and the surrounding area is packed with B&Bs so finding a place to lay your head shouldn't be a problem. anturstiniog.com/Accommodation/

FIXING YOUR BIKE

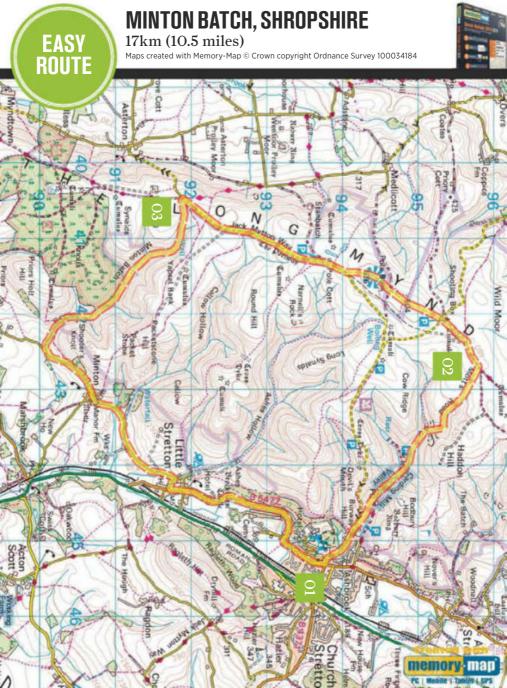
The visitor centre stocks essentials but it's well worth taking a selection of spares; mech hangers, tubes and even tyres are worth having to hand, along with a basic toolbox.

WHAT TO RIDE

A trail bike with 140mm of travel is fine for the majority of the trails. More importantly, fit sticky tyres with a thick carcass — slate is very slippy when wet and you don't want a flat tyre spoiling your fun. Don't be shy of strapping pads or armour on, because rock hurts and if you're doing things right you'll have at least one close shave. A full-face helmet is mandatory on the black runs and advisable for everything else.









MINTON BATCH, SHROPSHIRE

17km (10.5 miles)

WAY TO GO

START (OS137/SO453935) Easthope Rd, Church Stretton

With the Co-op on your L, ride up to the main road and turn R for 500m to the 2nd L (Carding Mill Valley). Take this and keep SA, past the pavilion, and up the main track that climbs up the valley floor. Bear R where a footpath goes L, and continue to the very top, where you'll meet a good track.

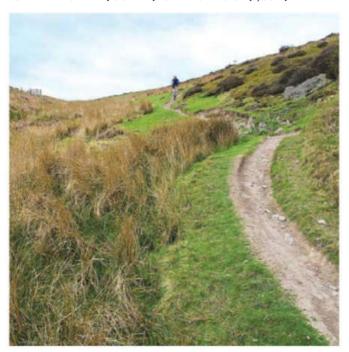
🛒 (SO427958) Track Junction, Mott's Road. Distance so far: 3.8km

Bear L onto this and follow it to a fork, where you bear R onto a waymarked BW. Continue SA over a road and climb to Pole Bank. Descend the other side and turn R onto the road. Now follow this until you are almost at the entrance to the glider club. Here, look out for a post on your L and head to it. Now locate a grassy trail that crosses the plateau and ducks into the obvious notch of Minton Batch.

(SO406919) Head of Minton Batch. Distance so far: 8.5km

Stay with it as it narrows and provides a stunning singletrack descent. Keep SA the whole time, eventually crossing the stream to drop to a road. Turn L to Minton and then turn L as the road swings R. Keep SA through the village and drop to Little Stretton, where you swing R to drop to the main road. Turn L back to Church Stretton.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 17KM (10.5 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 640M (2,100FT)



GETTING THERE

Start from the main, Easthope Rd Car Park, next to the Co-op (OS137/SO453935). Church Stretton is just off the A49, half way between Ludlow and Shrewsbury. Anybody west of the M5/M6 is best approaching from the M54 and heading south from Shrewsbury. The town has a railway station.

BEST TIME TO GO

Pretty good year-round trails, although Minton Batch needs careful treatment after rain.
Carding Mill Valley is very popular with walkers but you're climbing this so it shouldn't be a problem.

MAPS & GILIDEROOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 2

OS Landranger (1:50,000) 137 Church Stretton & Ludlow

OS Explorer (1:25,000) 217 The Long Mynd

Wales Mountain Biking by Tom Hutton (Vertebrate Publishing)

REFRESHMENTS

The Ragleth Inn is on the home leg and perfectly placed.

FACILITIES

Church Stretton has plenty of pubs. cafes and chippies.

Or check out the Shropshire Hills Mountain Bike Centre, 01694 781 515, mtb-shropshire.co.uk

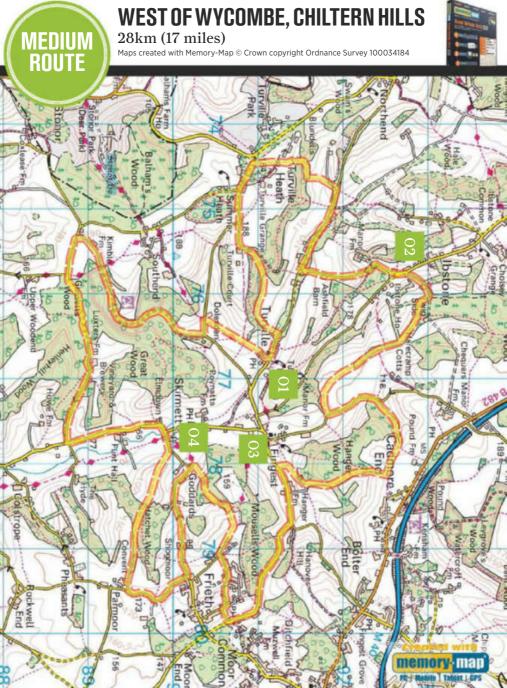
YHA Bunkhouse at All Stretton, 01694 722593.

Long Mynd Bridges Youth Hostel, 01588 650656.

Church Stretton TIC, 01694 723133.

OTHER OPTIONS

We ran a longer, tougher version of this loop in the Summer 2014 issue. Or check out the Mountain Bike Centre for other ideas.





WEST OF WYCOMBE, CHILTERN HILLS

28km (17 miles)

WAY TO GO

START (OS175/ SU767911) Turville

Turn L onto the road and again after 300m, onto a BW. Climb out of the trees and continue R beneath the woods before heading back into them. Climb to a gate and bear R onto the road. Turn R at a junction and keep SA through Turville Heath. At the next junction, turn R onto a narrow BW (waymarked). Follow this R of the buildings and down through the wood to the road. Turn R. then after 200m. L then R onto a parallel BW. Cross a drive and keep SA to a road. Turn L to Ibstone.

02 (SU757926) Ibstone.

Distance so far: 6.2km
Turn L onto the main road.

then R onto a concrete BW. Drop then swing R

before turning R onto a narrow BW (easily missed). Follow singletrack down, across a broad track, to continue through woods to the road. Turn L to climb slightly then turn R onto a BW that climbs up through wood and out onto a hilltop. Keep SA to T-junction and turn R to drop back into woodland. Continue down and ioin a drive which you follow R and then L to the road.

🦪 (SU780912) Road near Fingest. Distance so far: 11.9km

Turn L then take the first R to Frieth. Turn R by the Prince Albert and then R again. Now continue around to the L to climb up through the village to a junction at the very top. Turn R and once past the houses, turn L onto a rough BW. Drop into the wood and keep SA to drop to a road. Turn L to climb steeply up to Frieth village and turn R at the T-junction. After 1km turn R onto a BW by the convent and drop through a wood to Skirmett.

(SU778899) Road near Skirmett. Distance so far: 20.4km

Turn L then L again, for 1km to a X-roads where you turn R onto Dudley Lane. Follow this for nearly 3km, keeping SA when it joins another road, then turn R into Kimble Farm. Follow the diversion around the buildings and bear R onto the main track to drop into woodland. Stay on this to drop through woodland to a lane. Turn L then turn R onto a BW that leads back into Turville.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 28KM (17 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 680M (2,230FT)

GETTING THERE

There's some parking close to the Bull & Butcher in the centre of Turville (OS175/SU767911). Get here by following the B480 north from Henley-on-Thames. Rail users could get the train to Henley and join the route near Stonor.

BEST TIME TO GO

Definitely a better dry weather outing and a popular area with walkers and hackers, so care is definitely required.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Regions 1 and 2

OS Landranger Series (1:50,000) 175
Reading and Windsor

OS Explorer Series (1:25,000) 171 Chiltern Hills West

South East Mountain Biking: Ridgeway & Chilterns by Nick Cotton (Vertebrate Publishing)

REFRESHMENTS

Pubs at Fingest, Frieth and Skirmett.

FACILITIES

Post-ride pint in the Bull & Butcher.

Post-ride pint or B&B in the Frog at Skirmett, 01491 638996.

The nearest Youth Hostel is Streatley-on-Thames, 0845 371 9044, yha.org.uk

Henley TIC, 01491 578034.

OTHER OPTIONS

We brought you a full-blooded Hard in the Feb 2015 Issue — give that a try for starters.





WAY TO GO

START (OS124/SH677069) Abergynolwyn

From the Village Hall-cum-cafe take a L onto the main road, followed by a R almost immediately down the track just after the kids' playpark. Cross the stream via the footbridge and follow this BW NW for approximately 2km, until you hit tarmac. At the road, turn R and go SA for the next 2.5km. As you cross the stream, turn R and follow the track up into the hills.

(SH676105) Bridleway Junction. Distance so far: 5.7km

Keep your eyes peeled for a R turn off the main track onto a BW. As stated, this section is optional on the way up and you could keep to the main track (you go to the same place). Follow the BW through a river and steeply uphill and eventually back to the main track. Make a mental note of where it starts — you'll need it for the return. Keep climbing on the main track through gates.

(SH677121) Gates: Distance so far: 7.9km

Once through the gates go R, dropping through another stream and then climbing on a grassy track. At another gate go up to the R and follow the distinct track up through the switchbacks. Stay to this distinct trail all the way up to the junction with the Pony Path. The junction is obvious and here it is just a case of turning R and climbing steeply for just over 2km. There is an obvious path nearly all the way up but hopefully you will have a good view of the summit to guide you.

(SH711130) Trig Point: Distance so far: 12.2km

Now for the fun bit — simply turn round and let gravity carry you all the way back to Abergynolwyn, following the route you took up the mountain.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 24.5KM (15.5 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 893M (2,930FT)



GETTING THERE

Abergynolwyn is easily reached from the main A487 that runs north-to-south between Dolgellau and Machynlleth. For sat nav users, use the postcode LL36 9UU.

Rail is also an option with Tywyn Railway station being roughly 10km from the start of the route. Go to nationalrail.co.uk for more.

BEST TIME TO GO

The majority of the trail will hold up well all year round, but it may be worth avoiding the boggy bridleway halfway up in very wet weather.

As always, this is a proper mountain and you should go prepared, that means food, lots of extra clothes, mobile phones etc.

MAPS & GIIINFROOKS

Memory Map V5 Landranger

Memory Map V5 Explorer

OS Landranger (1:50,000) 124 Porthmadog & Dolgellau

OL Explorer (1:25,000) 23 Cadair Idris & Bala Lake

Guidebook: The Best Mountain Bike Trails In Snowdonia (bike-fax.com)

REFRESHMENTS

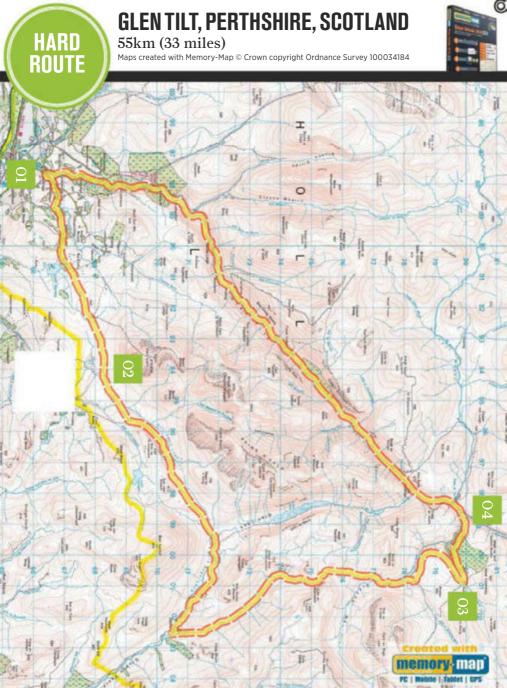
The cafe in Abergynolwyn is your best bet. Cafe Ceunant, 01654 782372.

There is a pub over the road too, The Railway Inn, 01654 782279.

FACILITIES

Accommodation is easy to find in this part of the world. We stayed at Dolffanog Fach at the bottom of the mountain in Talyllyn, dolffanogfawr.co.uk

Tourist info — Tywyn, 01654 710070.





GLEN TILT, PERTHSHIRE, SCOTLAND

55km (33 miles)



WAY TO GO

🥶 START (OS43/NN874662) Car Park, Old Bridge of Tilt

Turn R out of the car park and L at the end of the road (Glenfender/Monzie). Keep R at a fork (Monzie), and climb out of the woods and past a memorial Loch Moraig. Take the sharp L bend and keep SA, through a gate, onto a track. Stay with this for over 3km and as it bends sharp R downhill, keep SA on a vague, easy-to-miss track that quickly improves.

(NN939682) Track Junction on bend (easy to miss). Distance so far: 7.3km Climb then drop to a ford. Climb up the other bank (vague) and head straight uphill until you meet a clear contouring singletrack. Turn L and follow this around the hillside and up over a pass. It then widens and drops to a bridge. Stay with it and it eventually drops to a copse and buildings, where you turn L. Climb steeply to another pass, then drop to cross a bridge and continue to Fealar Lodge.

NO009799) Fealar Lodge. Distance so far: 29.7km

Turn L to cross the bridge and bear L to follow diversions beneath the yard. Go through the second gate and climb steeply up until you reach a vague track. Turn L onto this and it quickly improves and eventually goes through a gate and becomes great singletrack. Follow this carefully around the hillside then down steeply to a ford.

(NN986798) Ford Allt Garbh Buidhe. Distance so far: 32.4km
Cross and keep SA to keep the River Tilt, to your L. Continue to the spectacular bridge at the Falls of Tarf and then keep SA to continue down the glen, eventually joining a broad track that you follow for over 10km to a bridge. Cross and continue down to another bridge, always on the main track. Cross again and continue down through woodland to Bridge of Tilt.

GETTING THERE

Start from Old Bridge of Tilt car park (OS43/NN874662). This is well-signed from the B8079 in Blair Atholl, which itself is well-signed and just a short distance from the A9, six miles NW of Pitlochry. Blair Atholl has a railway station.

BEST TIME TO GO

pretty rideable in all conditions but a serious and long undertaking in the short days of winter. Choose your day carefully. The ford at 2/3 distance (NN985798) could be dangerous in spate and is best avoided in prolonged wet weather. Midges can be bad in summer.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

Memory Map V5 OS Landranger (1:50,000) Region 6

OS Landranger (1:50,000) 43 Braemar to Blair Atholl

OS Explorer (1:25.000) 394 Atholl

Scotland Mountain Biking — The Wild Trails by Phil McKane (Vertebrate Publishing)

REFRESHMENTS

Take a pack full of sarnies.

FACILITIES

Chippie in Blair Atholl.

Post-ride pint in the Atholl Arms Hotel in Blair Atholl, 01796 481205.

B&B in the Atholl Arms Hotel in Blair Atholl, 01796 481205.

Pitlochry TIC, 01796 472215.

blairatholl.org.uk

OTHER ORTHONIC

Laggan's a reasonable bundle ride, or for more natural stuff, carry on up the A9 to Aviemore, where there's loads of choice — see June 2015 Ryvoan Bothy Easy or August 2014 for a harder option in the Inshriach Forest.

TOTAL DISTANCE: 55KM (33 MILES) TOTAL ASCENT: 1,550M (5,086FT)

RIDE GUIDE

This month's routes

WHERE TO RIDE AND EXPLORE

O1 HADD BOHTE

CADER IDRIS, NORTH WALES

24.5km (15.5 miles)

nowdon's little brother may be shy of the magical 1,000m mark, but don't think it's any less of a challenge than its more illustrious neighbour. Whatever the season, whatever the conditions, Cader Idris is tough.

We started from Abergynolwyn to take in some singletrack before getting stuck into the ascent. The climb is a slog, but when is getting to the top of a mountain ever easy? It's largely manageable, but there will be times you're forced to walk. The really tough part begins when you join the Pony Path. Top tip: make sure you're wearing comfortable shoes!

The summit should provide you with great views and an opportunity for a breather.

You'll know what to expect on the way back down, but be warned, get cocky and the mountain will bite. There's loose rock, bedrock and rock that's desperately trying to break free and follow you all the way down the mountain. The potential for crashing is never far away, and nice places to fall off are few and far between. You could say discretion is the better part of valour up here. Having said that, the only really stressful descending takes place on the Pony Path — after that, it's pretty much plain sailing all the way back.



O2 EASY ROUTE

MINTON BATCH, SHROPSHIRE

17km (10.5 miles)

A one-up-one-down of pure delight, this one. The climb is tough: steep enough to get you breathing hard, and technical enough in places for you to mess it up just before you raise your arms in celebration. And that's not really it yet either: Pole Bank — the highest point of the Mynd — is still a few metres higher. But once you touch the little round trig point, you'll have gravity with you the whole way. And some fine fun singletrack to enjoy it on too. Savour it, it's great fun and you definitely earned it.

O3 MEDIUM ROUTE

WEST OF WYCOMBE, CHILTERN HILLS

28km (17 miles)

This is a wacky little loop that barely gets a stone's throw from the start the whole way around, yet throws up some superb riding, with some great singletrack, a few rough and rooty descents and a couple of meaty climbs. The hills may be small in this part of the world but they are still a challenge. Picking highlights is tough: it all flashes by in a blur of leafy wonderfulness that demands a bit of concentration. Our favourite bit? The wooded singletrack down from Ibstone probably; but it really is all good...

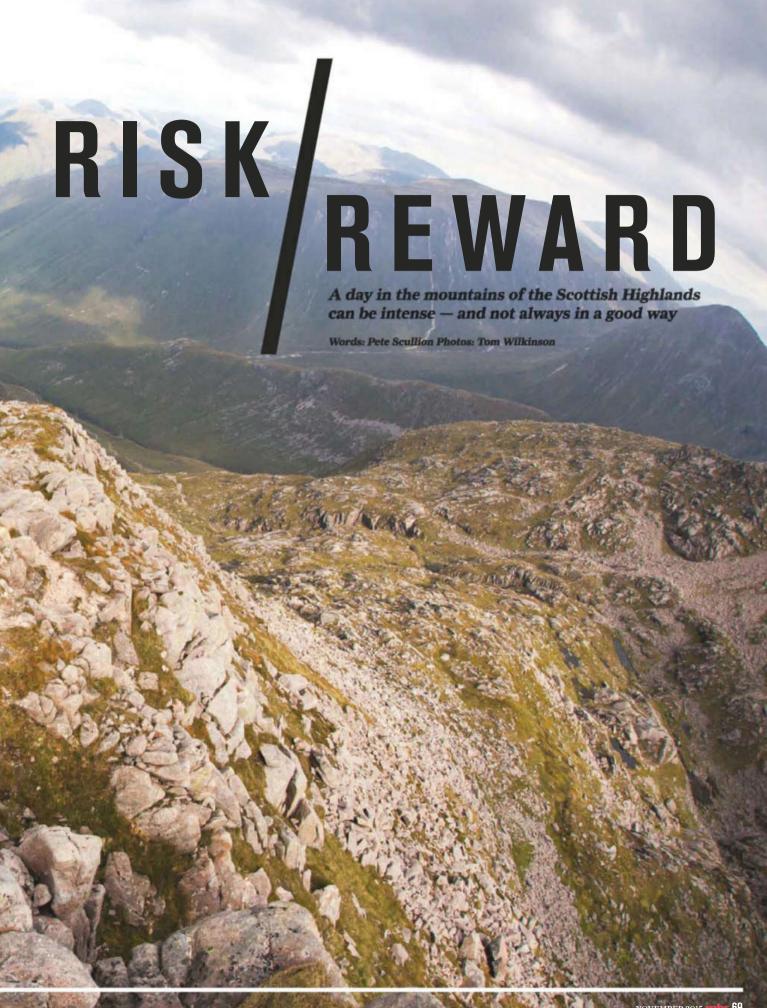
04 HARD ROUTE

GLEN TILT, SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

55km (33 miles)

A big day out and a true classic. Awesome, remote situations and top-notch riding that really captures the flavour of big mountain days in the Highlands, yet it never feels like too much, and is certainly within the grasp of most competent riders. There are two big climbs — both totally doable — and plenty of descents, some fast and furious and some a little more technical. Best of the bunch has to be the switchbacks that drop down to the ford near the Falls of Tarf. A word of warning: this could be uncrossable during periods of prolonged wet weather or flash floods.





ogether, bikes and maps can produce some extraordinary adventures. Some of my favourite trails have been discovered the hard way rather than with the benefit of local knowledge. But it's never, ever a guarantee my general rule is that for every five trails explored like this, four will be terrible or terrifying... and one will become an all-time favourite. The Scottish Highlands is perfect for this kind of trip, where even the most dead-end of stalkers'

paths can sometimes offer a sublime experience in both directions.

Those classics are just one fifth of the experience, however. It doesn't always go to plan.

No amount of map-reading or Google Earthsquinting can prepare you for what is on the ground. Mountains never look as tall as the trig point height suggests; contours never quite seem that close, bogs so wide or midgies so plentiful. The only advantage to this kind of exploration is that you've found another candidate for the exchange of 'shocking ride' stories in the pub.

The classics are out there — maybe more than you think — but it all depends on what you're

looking for. The ride I'm about to tell you about, which was undeniably beautiful, amid some of Scotland's finest wilderness, has left me with mixed feelings. I don't know where it ranks on my own personal scale. Every photo I see makes me smile. The feeling of being so tiny around nature so monumental fills me with an urge to be outside and remote soon. Very soon.

On the flipside of that coin, however, is this: I'll never go back. My body aches from hours with a bike on my back. I remember the sinking feeling when the ground turned downwards in front of me and I knew I'd be unable to ride it. Then — and now — it left me pondering when a 'ride' becomes too intense, too extreme. I love to push myself... but this was at times too much. Modern full-suspension bikes have allowed us to take on many things that we used to think were unrideable...

IT LEFT ME PONDERING WHEN A 'RIDE' BECOMES TOO INTENSE



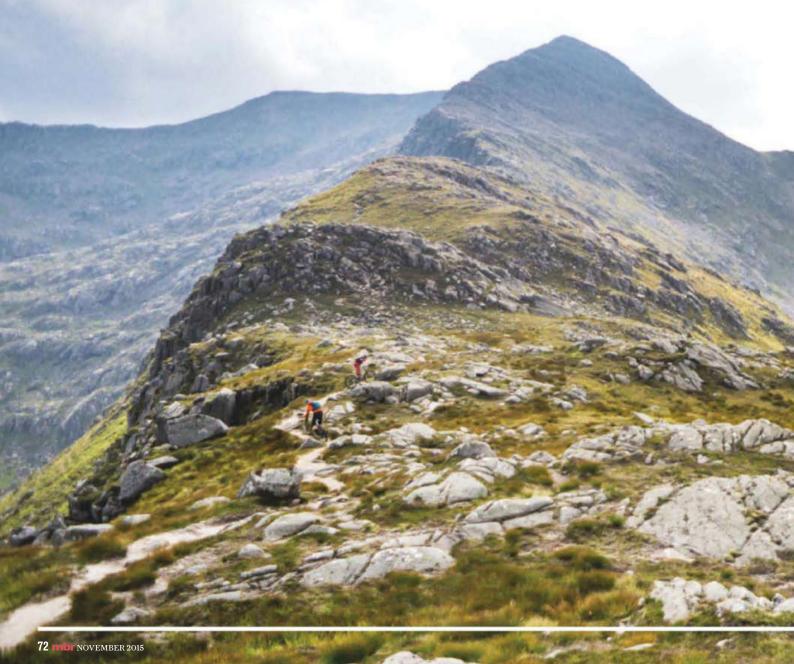




FEATURE

ON THIS TRIP WE MIGHT HAVE FOUND OUR LIMIT, AND FOUND IT A FEW TOO MANY TIMES







but on this trip we might have found the limit, and found it a few too many times.

Did I enjoy myself? Yes. Would I ride it again? Let's just say I'm glad I did it, and leave it at that.

GENTLE BEGINNINGS

After many months of waiting for the right weather and the right company, I had a sleepless night as excitement set in. The 6am start to meet Dirt School coach and Scottish mountain bike hero Rab Wardell wasn't the earliest of rises, but we'd definitely feel it later as the evening fatigue set in.

The drive was under a clear sky, the rising sun made it a promising start... and 90 minutes later we were ready to ride.

Preparing our kit, just off the road, the challenge of the day ahead started to dawn on us. The ancient volcanoes, carved sheer by numerous glaciers over millennia, were an imposing presence, marching skywards for more than a kilometre within the same distance from the sea. It was clear that our out-lap would be one of burning muscles and heavy lungs — but what we didn't realise at the time was that the in-lap would be just as challenging.

Rolling out across the road, the first mile was deceptively easy. Fast, riverside singletrack was awash with colour as the sun appeared from behind the cumulus that swirled around our chosen summit. As we approached the last section of flat, smooth trail for some time, a tall ridge that looked like the back of a massive stone crocodile emerged from the cloud up ahead.

It wasn't long before our bikes were on our backs and several hours of hike-a-bike began. It was clear that we wouldn't be able to come back down this route — it was an awkward shape up the broad ridge and punishingly loose. A small slip sapped far more strength than it should. Wherever the gradient flattened, bikes were lowered to the ground and we'd hunker down out of the wind to take on more fuel. After just 45 minutes of climbing, our car down below looked like a toy. The hill was so steep, we'd climbed several hundred metres already.

Before the final push to the summit across a boulder field with no obvious path or rideable line, we were treated to a slither of singletrack that defied everything we'd seen thus far. The sandy ribbon perched atop a knife edge seemed completely out of place. Our gazes of disbelief quickly disappeared and we were sprinting out of the saddle — though poor Rab behind me was stuck with my less-than-perfect choice of line.

We relished the break in ascent, even if it was short-lived, but we were soon picking our way clumsily through boulders that clung to the sheer ridge leading to the summit. At the top a panoramic view unfurled before us, a full kilometre above the sea below. A long, wide loch stretched west, and we couldn't see a single house or building in any direction. We were alone, with only the howl of the wind for company.

In theory it was all downhill from here — but in practice I was about to commence one of the most full-on experiences I have ever had on a bicycle.

OUT ON A LIMB

We found ourselves on a ridge that seemed as out of place as the singletrack we'd seen before. A broad plateau was flanked on all sides by sheer cliff faces, with only two ways out. We could either retrace our steps, or follow the ridge down and across to our second mountain of the day.

Dropping into a narrow trail, the surface beneath our tyres was deceptively slippery. Survival mode set in; this was no place to take chances. A clipped pedal or inopportune slide would mean leaving in a helicopter — or worse, in a box. Thankfully, below the rocky spines we'd seen hours before, the ridge widened, allowing the trail to do the same. The lack of grip didn't seem quite so terrifying now.

Soon we were struggling to find a path at all. Once again we'd discovered that conditions on the ground are often very different to the dotted line on the map. Even satellite images can be misleading, and in this case, the path simply







did not exist. The boulders thinned out to a barely visible deer line in the vague direction we needed, and before long a perfect line of white singletrack led back towards the car. At last the rewards of our efforts were there for the taking.

By now, arms and legs had taken a hammering and the steep, loose path was all the more difficult as a result. Enjoying this trail was what the day had to be about, not just carrying a bike up and then back down a Scottish peak, and we tried to get into the rhythm of 'rock surfing' — a fine art that will be familiar to anyone who has spent time riding the lesser-used walkers' paths of the Highlands. We seemed to be getting somewhere, but conditions beneath us were changing rapidly. The wind funnelled viciously up the glen; getting started, or negotiating the super-slow, technical sections, felt close to impossible.

BLESSED RELIEF

Steep, loose switchbacks wound their way down the face of the corrie. A measured approach was essential; a minor weight bias towards the front wheel was necessary to hook the back wheel through turns, but too much would see both wheels losing control, as we found out all too quickly. Steep trails rarely last though, and it wasn't long before we'd dropped considerable height with the tall peaks once more above us on all sides. We'd gone the hard way to get to this trail, but it seemed even sweeter as a result. Line of sight was clear for the duration, and both Rab and myself started turning the wick to make the most of the buff singletrack strung out ahead of us.

Every now and then came the tortured sound of tyres scrabbling for grip as brakes and wheel locked. A surprise river-crossing interrupted the flow for a second and then the charge downward continued in earnest. But on the lower slopes, Rab's fitness really started to show and I was left plodding along as best my legs could carry me. I slowed but his pace didn't seem to slacken; I had to ignore my body complaining just to keep him in sight. We stopped to regroup; both of us looked back the way we'd come, and neither of us could see a rideable line. It didn't look any different when we were closer, but sometimes we made it happen.

The gradient steepened again as we met the path we'd followed to the summit many hours

earlier. Relief pushed a smile across our faces as the car was visible again. That was a tough day out; 11 hours of battling and struggling against the mountainside. At last we made progress thanks to gravity instead of pedalling or carrying; at last we regained some control and could choose our own direction of travel. A gentle gradient and easy surface were a welcome change; wide eyes and white knuckles were already beginning to abstract into memory.

Chat soon turned to fish and chips before the last mile along the river was dispatched in silence. The only goal was to get back to the car as fast as we could, fighting our exhaustion and a final kick in the road. It was a real twist of the knife; both our faces contorted as we ran out of gears, our legs and lungs at breaking point.

Loading the bikes back into the car, we looked back with shaking heads. That was ridiculous. We poured fuel down our necks and allowed ourselves relieved grins. It was a day that would be hard to forget for many good reasons, a proper adventure, and certainly one of the most intense experiences I'll ever have on a bike.

It's not something I'll be rushing to repeat, but I definitely won't forget it in a hurry.

COMMON SENSE

This particular route had been on the tick list for at least seven months, and the reason the plans took so long to come to fruition was poor weather and a lack of riding companions. Poor conditions can make this kind of ride dangerous. And heading out solo, even in good weather, could end in disaster.

Rules to remember

- Prepare well
- Know your route
- Know your limits
- Tell someone where you're going (even if you're not alone).
- Take extra layers (a windproof layer and a hat at the very least).
- Know your exit strategy
- Be prepared to sack it off after five minutes after all, the mountain isn't going anywhere.







EDICE BYNAME

Five days, 240 kilometres, 7,000 metres of climbing and, for the fittest and fastest, at least 15 hours of flat-out riding. Welcome to Wales's latest stage race, Epic Cymru

Words: Jason Moeschler, Matt Page, Martin Astley, Joe Murray Photos: Anthony Pease









ulti-day stage races offer riders more than just the thrill of competition; they take you on a journey of discovery, revealing new trails and forging new friendships. A new event in South Wales promised to offer the thrills of the Trans Provence, just across the Bristol Channel.

We spoke to racers and organisers to see how the first ever edition of this five-day race panned out.

THE RACER: JASON MOESCHLER

On the morning of August 11, I left my house in California at 5.30am to pick up my team-mate Mark Weir and head to the airport. It was only nine days since I'd won the infamous Downieville cross-country race, and my legs were feeling good after all the soul-sucking training I'd put in ahead of that competition. After this race, I faced more than a month of work-related travel and standing around at trade shows, so this was my final chance to make my mark on the season.

With this in mind, I had only one goal. I was heading to the Epic Cymru to win. I made sure to tell plenty of people that this was my sole intention. This would keep the pressure on.

Details of what I'd face across the Pond were sketchy. I had heard the word 'enduro'. I had heard people say bring a bike between 120mm and 160mm travel. I had heard that the mud 'might' not be too bad in August. There were also rumblings of some pretty long days, but other than that, I knew nothing. This excited me. Finally, a race with unknowns, rather than one where you can go and pre-ride the hell out of the same trails day-afterday before racing the track one final time.

To be safe, I brought as many tyres as my 70lb baggage limit would allow. Tyres mixed in with clothes, all in one bag. Sweet. I'd smell like a rubber factory for the whole week.

When Weir and I travel together, we tend to have a lot of issues. On this trip, our bikes didn't show up at Heathrow. We were without them for two and a half days. I'm sure we missed some good riding, but screw it — I needed some rest anyway.

The race began with a prologue time trial, just like they have in Le Tour. It was 15km, with 500m of climbing, but I managed to get round in under half an hour — enough for the fastest time of the day. Just. We remained in Margam Park for day two, but it was a whole different ball game; over 50km of riding, and nearly 1,500m of climbing. As I was to find out, there would be another three more like it before crossing the finish line.

I soon learnt that Epic Cymru was not just about going fast downhill. There were as many special stage climbs as descents. Even the downhill stages in Margam had plenty of pedalling. And on the way to Aberdare the next day, there was a tough ascent with rocky steps and ledges followed by loose, baby-head rocks that was quite possibly the most technical climb I have ever raced up.

They say there is never blue sky in the UK, but on the third day, it was as blue as any in Southern California. Along with the amazing weather, we were also treated to some really great descending. The trails touched on BikePark Wales and Mountain Ash, and the three special stage descents had Weir smiling from moustache tip to moustache tip.











ABOUT EPIC CYMRU

This year's was the first edition of Epic Cymru a five-day mountain bike stage race that takes in trails around Margam Park, Afan, BikePark Wales and other South Wales riding hotspots. The race combines timed sections with transition stages in an enduro-style format, although the riding itself contains elements of cross-country and downhill as well as enduro itself. Time trials, DH tracks, hill climbs... competitors faced all kinds of special stages in a tough test of all-round mountain biking ability. For more details, see epiccymru.com

- DAY 1 Prologue Time Trial, Margam Park, 15km, 500m climbing
- DAY 2 Start/finish Margam Park, 52km, 1,530m of climbing, four timed stages
- DAY 3 Margam Park to Aberdare, 52km, 1,425m of climbing, four timed stages
- DAY 4 Start/finish in Aberdare, 47km, 1,464m of climbing, four timed stages
- DAY 5 Start/finish in Margam Park, 49.9km, 1,524m of climbing, two timed stages





We paid the price on the final day, however. It started raining during the night and never stopped. The race stages had rivers flowing down them and, with no front mudguard, I was literally riding blind. But somehow I got through the day with the third best time, enough to take the overall win by over two minutes.

Finishing was reward in itself, so to win, in those conditions, made all the suffering seem painless. Travelling to the Epic Cymru with my best buddy was like a long overdue Mancation. Weir and I had such a great time riding, eating, drinking, strategising, filling the diesel with unleaded. Yes, it was a race, and yes, it hurt. I could happily go back again, and do this race more as a ride. Take it all in. Either way, as the race name suggests, it was completely epic, and I will remember the experience for the rest of my life.

THE ORGANISER: MATT PAGE

Why has the UK lacked a stage race for so long? Since the marathon Trans Wales in 2011, there has not been a true multi-day mountain bike race in the UK. I've been lucky enough to travel overseas and experience some of the biggest and best stage races around the world, but I've always felt like the fantastic riding in Wales deserved a proper showcase too.

I wanted to try and bring the best features of each event to Wales, but create something unique and true to the area. So, in January 2014, I decided to organise something myself, and Epic Cymru was born. How hard could it be to organise a fiveday event, anyway?

As it happens, our rights of way laws turn organising any fully fledged mountain bike event in England and Wales into a nightmare. Racing on rights of way is illegal, which means traditional start-to-finish timing is impossible. The only solution was to adopt an enduro-style format, with timed stages linked by untimed transitions.

I wanted to create a challenging event, and I wanted to make the riding technical and rewarding, but I also wanted something that would be achievable for the average rider. This was difficult in itself, because one rider's technical challenge is another's ride in the park. I tried to incorporate trails that anyone could roll down,

but the faster riders could fly down. Nowhere encapsulated this more than Mountain Ash; a former DH race course until a few years ago, but a track that anyone can ride down and have fun on. It was unanimously the riders' favourite stage of the event.

Away from the actual riding, there was everything else to organise; venues, transport, catering, accommodation, facilities, staff and volunteers. I didn't realise quite how much goes on in the lead-up to the event, and behind the scenes during it. Now I understand why there hasn't been a stage race in the UK for four years!

We had the full spectrum of riders attending the event, from people who only started riding six months ago, to Joe Murray, one of the founding fathers of mountain biking.

There were XC racers and pro enduro riders, but the feedback from all corners has been fantastic. For 2016 we will keep the recipe the same, but try to use new trails and cover different riding areas. Wales is a big country with lots of good riding, so the potential is limitless.













THE DOWNHILLER: MARTIN ASTLEY

Taking part in the inaugural Epic Cymru was a leap of faith for me. Actually, I think it was for most of the participants. I've never done a stage race before, and I definitely have a bias towards more DH-oriented events, so I knew all those consecutive days in the saddle would be tough. I've known, Matt, the organiser, for a good while now, and I know he likes to punish himself—but I also know he has the experience and knowledge to put on a great event, so I was prepared to trust him and sign over five days of my life to his control.

A competition like this is all-consuming. From the prologue on Saturday, I lived, breathed and slept the race. It's a huge undertaking. Each day we were treated to a smorgasbord of great trails; up, along, down and up, again and again! Fifty kilometres a day may not sound like a great deal, but when you add 1,500 metres of climbing and special stages that require you to give your all, the effort begins to take its toll.

I hadn't anticipated so much timed climbing in the event, and by the end of day two, I was beginning to think Epic Cymru wasn't for me. This, however, is exactly where it pays to dig deep, remain positive and persevere. It was all worth it come day three, which contained two of Wales' premier downhill trails at BikePark Wales and Mountain Ash. I clawed my way back up the leaderboard and the race was on again!

If there was one thing I learnt at Epic Cymru, it was the importance of remaining positive and never giving up. The fourth and fifth days of the event were tough, but as a group of racers, we'd turned a corner after day two. After those great descents, we'd all bonded as a team, and I noticed far more banter among the group. People were helping each other with mechanicals on the trail, and riding in groups between special stages; together we'd become a community on a mission.

Epic Cymru lived up to its name. I can be a bit of a masochist at times, and in my eyes, if an event doesn't make you feel like quitting at times, it didn't push you hard enough. Epic Cymru challenged me, taught me lessons and introduced me to new people and a new style of riding. Will I be back again? Hell yes!

THE MTB PIONEER: JOE MURRAY

Epic Cymru wasn't my first stage race. Nor was it the first time I'd ridden in Wales, although 1986 was a long time ago, and the man v horse v bike race has long been consigned to the history books.

I've competed in the BC Bike Race before, and that's an eight-day feast of technical singletrack in and around the meccas of Whistler, Squamish and the North Shore. My expectations for Epic Cymru were a little more down-to-earth, and mud and rain might be involved somewhere down the line.

In the end, the singletrack exceeded my expectations, with BikePark Wales a real highlight for me. I wish we had done some more trails there.

As is so often the case with this style of events, the camaraderie was really good. Everyone was super-friendly, casual and relaxed. I rode with many of the same riders every day, so we got to know each other and push each other. WTB gave out free beer every day, which, of course, helped lubricate the social side.



For a first event, I think Matt did a nice job. A few more showers at the finish would be nice, but nature helped out in that respect and the riding itself was very good.

If you're contemplating entering next year, prepare for lots of climbing and longer stretches of dirt roads. Although there were all sorts of bikes and riders competing, I think a trail bike suited the terrain perfectly. It's a race for everyone, so really just get the bike in good working condition and get plenty of sleep. Then have fun!









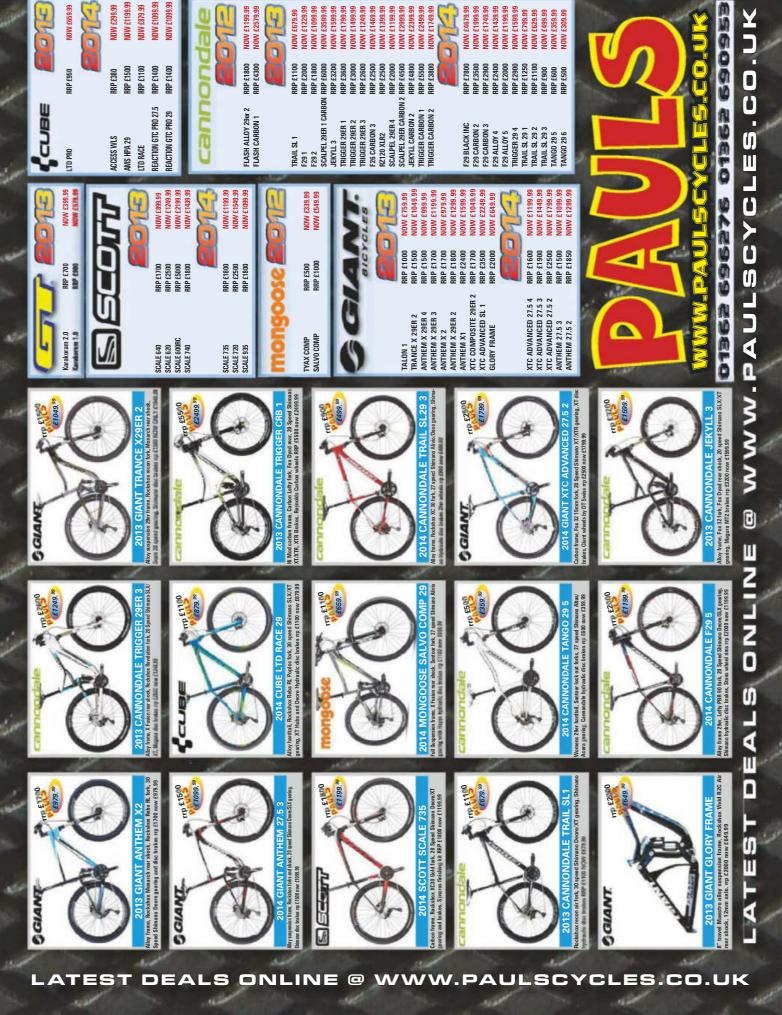












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potential, seeding 17th and placing 41st. ABOUT KENTA Trail bike: Trek Remedy From: Inverness,

Age: 23

- it's more than just a familiar phrase, it forms the very foundations of mountain biking. Mostly we suffer the climbs in order to enjoy the descents, but what if there were ways of making the former easier and the latter faster and more fun? Surely that would be a win-win situation. To find out, we asked Kenta Gallagher; a man who does both very, very fast. He's a former XC racer, turned World Cup downhiller and no stranger to

and boosting speed on the descents.

As much as we all get a thrill from a great descent, there are few things as satisfying as cleaning a technical climb without dabbing. The steeper the gradient, the more demands are made on our fitness and skill. Throw in a few technical challenges, such as rocks, roots and ruts and there's no better test of legs, lungs and balance. For crosscountry racers, this stuff is bread and butter, and we can all gain from their experience and insight when the trail points skywards.



There are two principle elements to every technical climb; preparation and effort. Preparation refers to the approach, or run-in, as well as any flat sections where you can recover for the next ramp. Effort applies to the actual obstacles on a climb, where concentration, power, balance and skill are at the forefront.

PREPARATION

- **BREATHING** First of all, get your breathing under control. If you've been putting in an effort before reaching the climb, take a few seconds to recover and calm down. You want to minimise any chance of getting into oxygen debt on the climb.
- **LOOK** Scan the trail, looking for the best approach. Look for smooth lines, areas with good traction where you can pedal hard, and any major obstacles that you need to avoid. Gauge the gradient and spot the top of the climb, if it's visible. Don't be immediately put off by the most direct line,

even if it's the steepest. A more gradual route may look easier, but remember, you'll be going further and prolonging the climb — it may take extra effort to overcome the steepest section, but you'll be at the top and recovering sooner.

- ATTITUDE Decide how you're going to approach the climb: how much effort it's going to take, where, if anywhere, you can afford to take a breather, and whether you are going to tackle it slow and steady, or attack it with speed and try to get up as soon as possible. If it helps, break the climb down into sections, and just focus on one at a time.
- **GEAR** Ideally you want to stay in one gear ratio up a technical climb. Changing gear under load is asking for trouble you're increasing the chance of snapping a chain and worsening general wear and tear on the drivetrain. Yet, back off to change gear and you're going to slow down immediately and lose momentum. It's always a safe bet to pick a slightly easier gear than a slightly harder one.

SADDLE By looking at the gradient, surface and the severity of obstacles to overcome you can gauge which saddle height will work best. If you've got a dropper seatpost you can tune it as you go, but bear in mind, while it's easy to raise your seat on a climb, if you're out of the saddle, it may not be so easy to drop it.

Once you've set up the bike and got into the right head space, it's time to put the effort in and clean the climb.

EFFORT

LOOK From the run up you should have a good idea about the layout of the climb and the line you're going to take. So once the trail rises up, keep your eyes on the next obstacle you're going to reach, along with brief glances further ahead in order to spot anything unexpected. You may need to adapt your route along the way, as even a badly placed stone can be enough to cause a dab or send



you off-line. Keep an eye out for such risks and where you can go to avoid them.

- **BODY** On the steepest gradients, the front end of the bike will try to lift off the ground. To prevent these wheelies, bend your arms to bring your chest closer to the bars, and you may also need to shift further forward onto the nose of the saddle. The steeper the climb, the more you're going to need to exaggerate this position. Too far forwards, however, and you may lose traction at the rear wheel. Learning precisely where to place your body weight between the two wheels only comes with experience, but it's what will decide whether you make the climb, or have to dab.
- **OVERCOME** Obstacles, such as rocky steps or slippery roots, will try to break your rhythm on a climb. As you approach one, hover just above the saddle — this will give room for the bike to come up into your body as it rolls over the obstacle. If it looks like the rear wheel is going to spin when you hit it,

increase your speed a little. Once your front wheel reaches the obstacle, apply a little extra power and allow the front end to rise up. Place it down past the obstacle. Before your rear wheel hits it, shift your weight forwards and pick the rear end of the bike up, using your feet, to get it over. As soon as it lands, revert back to your original position and try to get a solid, smooth crank and regain momentum.

- **PEDAL** You've already chosen your gear for the climb, so stay in it at a speed that allows you to keep the cranks turning, while delivering plenty of torque to the rear wheel. You want to be smooth with your power and you don't want to bog down in too high a ratio. It's a subtle balance between power and traction, so you'll need to be sensitive.
- **RECOVER** Many climbs have sections that require a variation in effort from top to bottom. So, when you have the chance, ease off on the pedals and take a few deep breaths to re-compose yourself, whilst double checking the route you intend to take.

- time on a climb stalling if you've gone off too manoeuvre. Instead, take the climb slow and
- expending less energy, so whenever possible,
- your front wheel when on the limit up a climb, but try to look up and scan ahead every now and again to check you are on the correct line and give you time to prepare for what you're approaching.
- **MOVE AROUND THE SADDLE** On steep climbs, subtle changes in body position can make all the difference. The further forwards you sit on the saddle, the better you'll keep the front end down whilst keeping traction on the back wheel. Try changing the angle of the saddle slightly so that the nose points a degree or two down. This will help your weight distribution on steep climbs and give you something to push against when pedalling.
- **SMOOTH CRANKING** Stomping on the pedals is a recipe for disaster on climbs; the surge in power can bring the front end of the bike up and off the ground, and it can also spin the rear wheel on a loose rock or root Instead, concentrate on transmitting smooth, consistent power through the cranks.

Fit Fox fork volume spacers

It's never been easier or cheaper to tinker with the spring rate on your Float 34 or 36 fork, with volume-reducing spacers

years has been the introduction of air volume reducer spacers as a totally new way to tune your fork. We talk a lot about these little plastic spacers, but what do they do? Well, by reducing the air volume, they cause the spring rate to become more progressive as the fork moves through its travel. The upshot is that you can lower the pressure for better small-bump sensitivity without the fork diving through its travel or bottoming out too often.

erhaps the biggest advance in suspension technology in recent

To translate this to the trail, if you're riding steep stuff or lots of jumps

you'll want the extra depth to your travel, so fitting extra spacers is a no brainer. However, if you find yourself struggling to use all the travel, it may be time to take some out.

With a bit of practice, fitting spacers should only take you about five minutes, which means you can then experiment with different settings to get your set-up totally dialled, even out on the trail.

You also don't have to worry about getting your hands dirty, because the only specialist tool you'll need is a 28mm socket for the Fox 34 or a 32mm socket if it's a Fox 36. Fox's UK importer, Mojo, even makes a custom version of these sockets with a flattened edge, which gets a better purchase on the narrow top cap. These cost £15 each — but when you consider that a new top-cap would cost £40 if you rounded it off (likely if you use mole grips or an adjustable wrench), it's not a bad investment.

YOUR EXPERT

LUKE BURNETT Luke is a former downhill racer turned Mojo shop technician. He fixes forks in the week and tries to keep up with Mojo boss Chris Porter's crazy contraptions on the weekend.

■ TIME TAKEN 5 minutes **■ DIFFICULTY LEVEL**

Dead easy **■ TOOLS REQUIRED**

Volume-reducing spacers • 28mm or 32mm socket

> Torque wrench

FOX 34

Different forks will need different spacers — the 34s are yellow. Be aware that there is a maximum number of spacers you can fit in your fork. depending on its travel. For a full run-down visit po.st/34airspacers





Remove the dust cap from the top of your fork; you should be able to do this with just your fingers. Let the air out of your fork the same you would with





For the Fox 36 fork there are two sizes of token. The blue ones are 7.6cc and the orange ones are 10.8cc, so the orange ones will remove more air and therefore give you more ramp. You can fit the blue and orange tokens in any combination up to a maximum of four spacers.



Repeat steps one to three of the 34

procedure, except this time using a 32mm socket. When removing the top cap ensure you pull it vertically upwards as the air shaft will come







Re-assemble the fork, ensuring that you maintain pressure on the top cap as you tighten it to 26Nm.
Re-inflate your fork with 5-10 psi less than it had in it originally, although you can adjust this on the trail.





Tested

DMR AXE CRANK

£239.96

ECUNCATION Weight: crankset 667g, bottom bracket 117g • Colour: black • Length: 165, 170, 175mm • Chainrings: 26, 28, 30, 32, 36t • Contact: upgradebikes.co.uk

ith massive hollowforged arms, an oversized 30mm axle weight of 784g. DMR's AXE crank aims to be both light enough for trail use and tough enough for downhill abuse.

Fitting the Praxis-built bottom bracket was easy thanks to DMR's thoughtful inclusion of a proprietary tool that fits a standard 3/8in drive. The SRAM-style direct-mount chainring only requires three bolts nipping up so, all-in-all, it's a doddle. To make sure it goes without a hitch, a Praxis spec sheet (po.st/Praxis) shows how many spacers you need to run with your BB shell width - then it's just a matter of slotting the two-piece unit together and torquing up the single crank bolt.

After three months of use, the performance of the Axe hasn't blunted. The stiffness of both the arms, and the beefier spindle, is palpable. Pumping through turns feels more direct, climbing



seems more efficient, and landing drop-offs and jumps more assured

The narrow/wide Blade chainring needed a little bedding in to the new chain before they would engage together fully, but since

crankset spindle and inner bearing races — upon dismantling them for inspection, it's clear that their survival through a typical British winter seems unlikely.

Overall the Axe offers excellent value. For £240 you get all the parts you need to get you up and running but if you want to source your own BB and chainring, you can mix and match to suit. The crankset itself costs just £139.99 - which is almost half the price of

Shimano XTR.

Rob Hoyles



YOUR **TESTERS**



PAUL BURWELL

In a grump after testing night lights and being rejected for the next series of Great British Bake Off. Testing mudguards next



ROB HOYLES

Chalked up another big crash and flared his head tube in the process. On Stoptober, so no liquid bevies all month



MICK KIRKMAN

Recovering from a recent big smash in the Alps by combining Plus size bikes with regular doses of Ibuprofen and alcohol



DANNY MILNER

Just back from Whistler. buzzing Danny Hart's back wheel. Now expecting (amongst other things) the inevitable diet of UK trails



BEN SMITH

Tricked out Orange Five looking dialled, but lost the plot again this month, along with more hair... and his friends if he keeps it up



7IDP M2 HELMET

SPECIFICATION Weight: 335g • Sizes: XS/S, M/L, XL/XXL Contact: decade-europe.com

With dual-density foam, 7iDP's M2 aims to save weight without compromising impact absorption. It's also bottom-wrapped, to shield the soft polystyrene from dings. The rear of the helmet sits low, increasing the protection and also enhancing the fit. The retention device is a simple ratchet dial and, while it has a broad range to suit different head sizes, I found it dug into the back of my head if I wound the adjuster

The M2 has the same alloy visor screws as Troy Lee's A1, but the visor sits too low and sneaks into your peripheral vision when riding. Nor can you park your goggles beneath the peak like the latest designs.

Once on, the M2 is comfortable. There are no hot spots or hard edges and it has a thick, one-piece internal pad with insect mesh over the vents. Other nice touches include the cam on the chinstrap clasp — which stops it coming loose — and a channel at the back of the helmet for a goggle strap.

The M2 is a comfortable helmet that also feels incredibly stable.



It's not too hot, nor does it look too big on your head. On the down side there's not really a flat surface to mount a light or POV camera and the visor needs to tilt further back and have a better shape.

Paul Burwell



SCORES ON THE DOORS

What **mbr** ratings mean

Our grading system explained



















Something's wrong. It's rare, but sometimes a product will have a design flaw or some other weakness that means we can't recommend it. Steer clear.



faults but it has potential.

7 Good considering 8 Very good — for the money,

- a slight mod or two and it might we'd buy it. be perfect.

10 Simply the best - we couldn't fault it.

ANSWER ATAC AME STEM

SPECIFICATION Weight: 105g • Length: 30mm • Colours: black, red, white • Contact: hotlines-uk.com

If the super-stubby 30mm length doesn't give it away, the AME initials (All Mountain and Enduro) tell you exactly what sort of riding this Answer 6061 aluminium stem is targeted at.

30mm is the stumpiest stem length currently achievable. To go shorter, you need to resort to unusual or proprietary solutions: Pacenti has a design that uses a special dented handlebar that wraps round the steerer tube, and Mondraker's Forward Geometry stem requires your fork steerer to be cut restrictively short.

The AME stem is 3D forged for stiffness and then CNC'd to shape. It's zero-rise and uses a broad 52mm-wide faceplate with two separate front clamp straps, rather than a more common joined-up plate, so it does take slightly longer to install.

Swapping over from a Pro 35mm stem, it is noticeable that the 5mm less reach shifts rider weight rearward and steering becomes more immediate. But it's also evident that the Answer stem is not as stiff and direct as the (considerably heavier) Pro stem with the same bar.

So while it's more flexy that the Pro. the Answer weighs as little as the 30mm Syntace stem, but happens to be much better value.

Mick Kirkman





GORE BIKE WEAR POWER TRAIL GLOVE

£39.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 76g • Sizes S-XXXL • Colours: black • Contact: goreapparel.co.uk

Lining up in Gore's new Power Trail range, this long-finger glove has been a joy to ride in. Rather than Velcro. which can loosen midride or grab various bits of laundry when washing, it relies on a beautifully stretchy back and elasticated cuff. Just the right amount of padding left me with plenty of feel through the bar, while the highly breathable construction meant it was never less than totally comfortable. The perforated synthetic compatible. Bonus!

MAVIC CROSSMAX HYDROPACK LTD 8.5

SPECIFICATION Weight: 850g including reservoir • Storage: 8.5I • Reservoir: 3I •

For the last year or so, Mavic has offered a new generation of backpacks designed with input from its sponsored enduro racers. The narrow, streamlined LTD pack here is nearly identical to the standard Crossmax 8.5I pack, but has different styling and is £15 cheaper. There's storage for three litres of fluid, and the roomy main chamber (with well organised internal compartments) can hold enough tools, bobbins and layers for a full day in the saddle.

The zip-open design folds out completely flat for easy access and there's a hidden mesh harness that can hold a helmet, for liaisons or long climbs, but it's a bit fiddly. The ripstop nylon fabric is relatively thin, which keeps weight low and conforms to body shape well without that awkwardness some thicker packs can have.

The Crossmax is very stable and comfortable in every department — the broad hip belt has useful zipped pockets and locks the bag down to prevent swinging, even when you're riding dynamically. The tight-to-the-body shape resists snagging well, and the air flow and comfort of the padded spine area is excellent. To achieve this, six meshcovered pads keep the bulk of the pack slightly raised from the back and help create airflow and channel sweat away.

The wide and comfy shoulder harness straps feature a broad range of sternum height adjustment as well as vertical zipped pockets that are perfect for storing a phone, multi-tool or snacks.

Mavic has ticked every box here; overall it's a great trail riding pack. But we have a couple of gripes: the yellow straps get dirty easily, and while liquid in the Hydrapak reservoir doesn't slosh around thanks to a central beam — it doesn't have the best bite valve on the market and so the flow of drink is a bit measly

Mick Kirkman



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parts & accessories

AIRSHOT PUMP

£59.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 436g • Contact: airshotltd.com

Like the little gas cylinders you find in an ambulance, the Airshot is also intended to relieve pain, specifically, the pain of setting up tubeless tyres. I'm sure we've all been there — red faced and panting next to a track pump, a flat tyre and a pool of sealant on the floor. The simple fact is that most track pumps can't shift a big enough volume of air with one stroke to seal the tyre against the rim. Bontrager does make the Flash Charger, but it's £100 - pricey, even if you haven't got a track pump already. Step forward the Airshot. Effectively it's like a ghetto tubeless inflator you can make with an old Coke bottle and a couple of Presta valves, but engineered from posh metal, and thoroughly sealed, so it can take a lot more pressure. It

To operate, simply connect a track pump to the Presta valve at the top of the bottle, close the valve and attach the hose to the tubeless valve on your wheel. Pressurise the bottle to a maximum 160psi with the track pump, and open the tap. The air then blasts

> into the tyre, sealing it against the rim. So simple, yet so effective, and being separate, rather than built-in to a track pump, it's pretty easy to sling in the car for weekends away, and you can even charge it with a hand pump. I found 100psi was usually more than enough to get the tyre sealed. with seating duties then carried out with a regular track pump. Being tall and thin, the bottle had a tendency to topple over in use. A wider or weighted base would be preferable. Considering what you get in the box, the Airshot is not

> > chean, but take into account the reduced hassle and it's almost priceless.

Danny Milner



TRAIL BAR

£124.99

SPECIFICATION Width: 760mm • Weight: 222g • Backsweep: 9°, upsweep: 4° • Rise: 15mm • Contact: burgtec.co.uk

Burgtec has been pushing its RideWide idea for some time, offering some of the widest bars available long before they were fashionable. Burgtec offers the RW Carbon bar in two guises — the 760mm wide trail bar tested here and a burlier DH bar that's 40mm wider and around 60g heavier.

The 9° backsweep and 4° upsweep produces a shape that feels natural and requires no odd rotations to get a good position. It does bring the controls back towards you more than some, but with the bend finishing quite close to the stem, there is plenty of room to get them placed exactly as you like.

The matt carbon finish and bold yellow graphics look classy, and the centre section features a positioning grid for hassle-free set-up. On the trail the bar feels solid without being jarring; great for aggressive riders who are happy to trade immediacy for a bit of comfort.

The only small issue I have is that these days 760mm is not considered particularly wide. That said, with the Carbon DH bar available for the same price, my advice is to go for the wider option and trim them if required.

Ben Smith







PENDLE FORK MOUNT **ROOF RACK**

£88.25

SPECIFICATION Axle size: 9mm QR. 15mm and 20mm thru-axle options at no extra cost • Contact; pendle-bike.co.uk

I'm not a fan of roof racks that clamp the down tube and hold the bike upright with both wheels attached. There's loads of wind resistance, the bike never seems that stable and squeezing the down tube on a lightweight carbon bike doesn't fill me with confidence. There is another option, though. Fork-mount racks, like this Britishmade Pendle, fasten the dropouts securely using the fork's own 15mm (or 20mm) thru-axle, coupled with a simple toe strap at the rear wheel. Simple and safe, they cause little damage to the bike. And by using a couple of extra toe straps, you can lash the front wheel to the frame and maximise storage space inside your car.

The Pendle rack is considerably cheaper

than Thule's version, and though it doesn't look quite as slick, it definitely feels well made. Because the fork mount doubles as the clamp to the front roof bar, I found it difficult to get the rear wheel holder far enough forward to allow the boot to open on a small hatchback. In the end, I had to get out the hacksaw and trim part of the extrusion. It's also worth noting that, unlike Thule, there's no integrated security, so you'll have to use your own lock if leaving the car unattended. Besides those minor points, this Pendle rack comes highly recommended.

Danny Milner

MADISON FLUX SUPERLIGHT SOFTSHELL JACKET

ECIFICATION Weight: 250g • Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL • Colours: black, red, yellow •

Madison's riding kit has come on leaps and bounds, and this year it's better than ever. This Flux is a lightweight, highly breathable, waterproof hooded jacket — ignore the softshell in the name.

Made from a soft, flexible fabric that packs down easily, it looks like a traditional showerproof jacket, but it also boasts the same waterproof and breathability ratings as serious three-layer mountain kit. It's fully seam-sealed against the elements too, but obviously won't be as hard wearing as a thicker, heavyweight jacket.

Sizing is spot on — it's cut to move freely, but it's not bulky and doesn't flap around. With a tight-fitting ninja hood to wear under a helmet during really nasty weather, it has proven to be the perfect jacket to carry during the summer in the Alps on bad weather days. Even when hot and humid, breathability is great, and the interior feels comfortable and not too clammy

next to bare skin, which bodes well fo

mixed UK conditions.







THE RIDER

JASON HARDY Position Picture editor Mostly rides Surrey Hills Height 6ft 2in Weight 101kg

THE BIKE

- 650b e-bike designed specifically for trail riding
- New 250w Bosch CX system offers power assist
- Fox rear shock delivers 125mm travel
- Weighs 20.8kg (45.9lb)

K, best make sure you're sitting down when you read this. Yes, an e-bike has joined the mbr longterm test fleet. With that out of the way, let me introduce you to my snappily-named KTM Macina Lycan 27.5 X1 11 CX5+. It's got 27.5in wheels and 125mm of travel at the rear married to a 130mm Fox 34 fork. All pretty standard stuff, but what sets it apart from a regular trail bike is the 36v 250w Bosch motor that provides assistance as you pedal. And I'll need all the help I can get, because the bike also weighs 20.8kg Just take a few deep breaths and let that one sink in.

I have my reservations about e-bikes and their place on the trails, as the whole concept of motor-assisted pedalling seems to go completely against the spirit of mountain biking, or any form of cycling, to be honest. But let's not rush to any snap judgments, especially as you're going to be reading about this bike for the next few months. Although I've only had a few days to get my head around the idea, I'm starting to see the benefits already. Bike test editor Muldoon raves about e-bikes. Whenever he's ridden one, he says it's been a complete hoonathon, involving shredding the trails as much on the ups as the downs. So that's shredding trails all the time then... That's got be a good thing, right?

WHY IT'S HERE

really are

cheating

Apart from the motor, battery and handlebar-mounted display, the KTM is a pretty standard trail bike. There's a familiar mix of Shimano XT brakes combined with a SRAM X1 drivetrain, To see if e-bikes boasting a wide-range cassette. One thing I've noticed that's missing are line guides for a dropper post, and there is definitely no option for stealth routing as the motor replaces the conventional bottom bracket.

At the handlebar, it all starts getting a bit Knight Rider. There's a Bosch Nyon colour LCD display that's super big and very easy to read, but looks a bit vulnerable to damage. With four different power

modes displayed, as well as navigation, range, calories burned etc, I might have trouble concentrating on the trail ahead. It even tells you how many trees you've saved, for Christ's sake! Although, how it can save as many as a naturally-aspirated mtb, I'm not sure. Along with wi-fi and Bluetooth connectivity for the inevitable smartphone app, there's a dizzying array of information to pore over.

> Will all this technology and assistance dilute the riding experience and turn me into an even lazier mountain biker? Is this bike an evil trail-churning overweight behemoth for indolent riders, or a bike that can expand the excitement, variety and

opportunities of my usual weekend schralp? Time will tell. Unusually for me, I'm actually looking forward to winter on the KTM, and seeing if it can enhance my ride and cope with the practicalities of mud and rain. I just need to check which electricity tariff I'm on first...





SPECIFICATION

Frame Hydroformed aluminium, 125mm travel **Shock** Fox Performance Series Float CTD BV

Fork Fox 34 Float, 130mm

Wheels DT Swiss 350 hubs, DT Swiss M422 rims, Schwalbe Rocket Ron 27.5x2.25in tyres

Drivetrain Bosch CX Pedelecsystem 250 watt electric motor, 36v 500Wh lithiumion battery. KTM Team Delta ISIS cranks, SRAM X1 mech and shifter

Brakes Shimano Deore XT, 180mm

Components Bosch Nyon LCD Center Display, Selle Italia SL saddle, KTM Team bar, stem, grips and seatpost

Sizes 15, 17, 19, 21in Weight 20.8kg (45.9lb)



Head angle 69.7° Seat angle 72.8° BB height 340mm Chainstay 475mm

Front centre 680mm

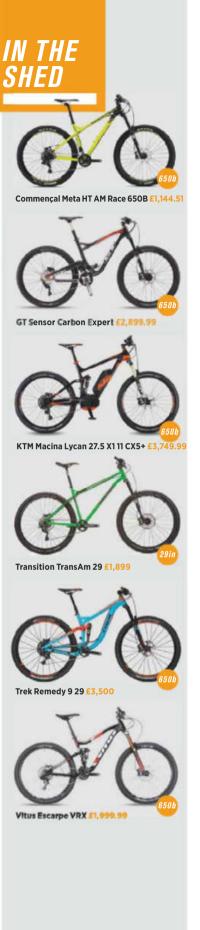
Wheelbase 1,155mm Down tube 670mm Top tube 585mm

Reach 426mm













THE RIDER

JAMIE DARLOW Position Buzz editor Mostly rides Surrey Hills Height 6ft 1in Weight 75kg

THE BIKE

- 29er trail bike with 140mm travel and enduro-bike stiffness
- New-fangled RE:aktiv damper from Fox and Penske Racing
- Mino link adjustable geometry to fettle head angle and BB height
- Internal cabling 1x11 drivetrain, Reverb Stealth dropper post

MONTH 8: JD throws caution to the wind — and a big bag full of geometry-tweaks at his Trek

To see if Trek,

Fox and Penske

have made the

ultimate

just one variable at a time when experimenting. Well, my old science teacher Dr Timewell [seriously?! - Ed] would be weeping now if he could see my Trek Remedy. I've changed the tyres, fitted new grips and bolted on a different saddle. Most extreme of all, though, I've messed with the geometry by fitting offset suspension hardware and an angled headset, dropping the ride height of the bike, increasing its wheelbase and slackening the head angle. The goal was to make the Remedy more confident when descending and cornering.

ood science demands you change

So has it worked? The short answer is: no. At least, not yet. On the first climb aboard Remedy 2.0 the bike felt harder to manoeuvre, with the front wheel flipflopping on really steep bits. No big deal, because I didn't tweak the geometry for climbing prowess.

The real payoff was meant to be on the descents. The bike does feel more planted in the corners, something that will take some getting used to over a few rides, as the amount of effort needed to

tip the bike in has changed. The trade-off is that the front end now feels too low and the bike's reach too compact — angling the fork out further in front of the bike has inevitably made the stem encroach further into the cockpit. I need to get a slightly longer stem and put a few headset spacers underneath to put my body into the right position on the bike again.

Suspension set-up has confounded me too, because with geometry changes of this kind I have to go back to the drawing board. I knew I'd have to put more air in the shock and could now afford to take some away from the fork, as the bike sits back more into its excellent rear suspension. But I didn't realise quite how much. I nearly washed out on the first corner because the balance of the bike was completely out. Then, on faster and rougher straight-line sections, I found the rebound was

now way too fast, and I was nearly bucked off the trail. WHY IT'S HERE

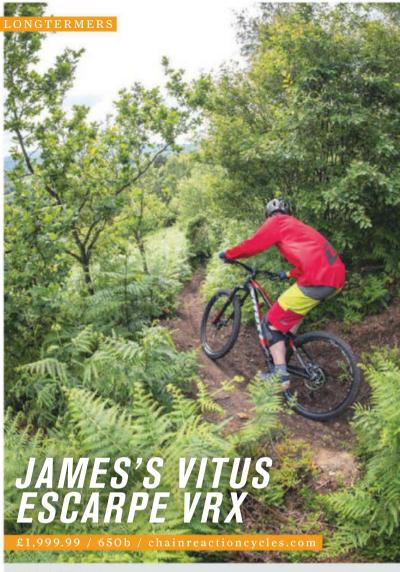
My gut feeling is that I can get the Remedy riding to perfection — but with such dramatic changes I'm going to need to start over with the suspension set-up.

ROO'S COMMENÇAL META HT AM RACE 650B

I've just had a quick look at the Commençal website, and the 2016 version of the Meta HT AM Race is now available. At the current exchange rate it costs £200 more, but with a RockShox Pike fork and 1x drivetrain, it's even better value for money. The frame itself hasn't changed, other than the colour, but thankfully the Formula brakes have been replaced by SRAM. Bonus!









THE RIDER

JAMES SMURTHWAITE Position Junior writer **Mostly rides**

Surrey Hills Height 5ft 11in Weight 70kg

THE BIKE

- 650b trail bike with slack geometry
- Asymmetric travel: 150mm front, 135mm rear
- Cutting-edge 1x11 SRAM drivetrain
- Short stem and RockShox Reverb Stealth dropper post

MONTH 4: It's war, with an assault on the Vitus's climbing prowess

WHY IT'S HERE

Bespoke dual

susser from

his month's riding has been interrupted by a holiday and some mediocre weather, so the Vitus has been restricted to local trail centre hacks.

CRC's own This is no bad thing, however; in brand the new age of uplifted bike parks it is easy to forget the simple pleasure of winching yourself to the top and feeling like you've earned the turns on the descent. As a trail bike I would have expected the Vitus's climbing performance to match its descending prowess, but I have not experienced this so far. The curved profile of the Escarpe's frame would lead you to believe that it is a sleek machine, but at 14.4kg, it can, at times, feel more like an ornate anchor. It will get you to the top, there's no doubt about that, but expect more of a seated grind than a dance out of the saddle. I'm going to try running the shock firmer to see if that helps win the war on gravity.

As the mountain biking mantra goes: "Light, strong or cheap; pick two". I love the solidity of the Vitus and the confidence it gives on descents, but to keep this, and lose weight, would mean showering it with kit that's not really representative of its price tag. So, for now, I'm happy labouring away, but if you do happen to pass me on a Swinley fireroad, a push would be much appreciated!



JIM'S TRANSITION TRANSAM 29

MONTH 9: The TransAm transitions back to its woodland roots



THE RIDER

JIM CLARKSON **Position** Graphic

Mostly rides Sussex trails Height 5ft 10in Weight 76kg

THE BIKE

- 29er 'allmountain' hardtail
- Durable steel frame with adjustable chainstay length
- RockShox Pike fork with 120mm travel
- Available as a frame-only for £499

fter racking up the miles last month on SPDs and dry weather tyres, the arrival of autumn has thrown mud and wetter trails into the mix. So the TransAm has gone back to the Schwalbe Magic Mary/Nobby Nic tyre combo that I fitted earlier this year. I've also returned to flat pedals.

The confident grip the tyres bring means fast and playful riding, even in these more taxing conditions. I'm also much happier roosting around woods and hitting trails with a more relaxed and adventurous vibe than I am knocking out race-pace laps. It's what the bike is best at too; with the distinct trail slant to the geometry encouraging a loose and punchy ride style, it's still nimble enough to be rewarding on every ride, regardless of the conditions or gradient.

It is strong, but it's not the lightest bike and feels slightly overbuilt. The 4130 cro-mo tubing is obviously to blame for the extra heft. I can't do anything about that, but some lighter wheels would really help, as the stock hoops are slow to get rolling and the hubs are already showing signs

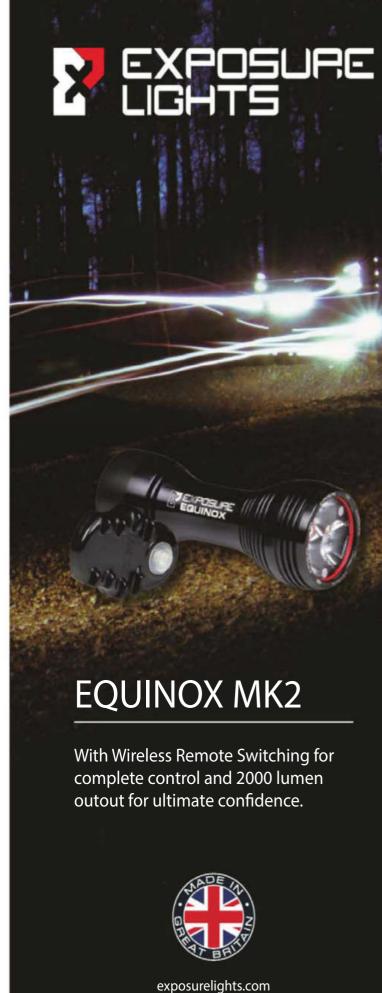
of bearing wear. I wouldn't want

to go all-out light, and even with an unlimited budget I probably couldn't, as the weight savings wouldn't be huge from just swapping the components alone.

WHY IT'S HERE A reliably tough hardtail for all-day riding











THE RIDER

DAVE ARTHUR Position Writer/tester Mostly rides FoD/Wales Height 5ft 11in Weight 66kg

THE BIKE

- Modern long, low geometry with 130mm of rear travel and a 130mm fork
- Full carbon-fibre frame and swingarm with forged and CNC'd PathLink
- Well-specced with reliable Shimano parts and KS LEV Integra dropper post
- Top-end bike from five-strong range starting at £1,499

MONTH 10: Crunch time — does the great i-Drive suspension make up for the GT's niggling gripes?

What attracted you to the GT Sensor Carbon Expert?

After a positive ride on the Sensor at its worldwide launch in America, I was keen to see how it stacked up in the closely fought trail-bike category. Yes, GT is still pushing its i-Drive suspension design, but it's radically revamped on this bike. And it's all wrapped up in a gorgeous carbon fibre frame with wings on the top tube... but would it give me wings on the trail?

Did you change anything straightaway?

Yes. When the bike arrived the advertised 150mm RockShox Revelation fork had been switched for a 130mm version in production, but that was easily remedied (at further cost) with a travel upgrade kit. The hardcompound tyres also came Carbon trail bike off, and the handlebar and stem were swapped for a combo that would promote suspension system a more involving ride experience.

Was the bike easy to set up?

Setting rear suspension sag is a little tricky because the shock is so low in the frame and shielded from view when sat on the bike. Helpfully, a small plastic sag indicator stuck to the swingarm provides 20 and 30 per cent sag gradients. I ran the shock quite firm, to provide a bit more support, but had no problem getting full travel. Setting the fork up optimally eventually involved adding a Bottomless Token to provide more support and progression.

How did it ride?

WHY IT'S HERE

with a unique

at a great

It's a bike of two halves. The rear suspension takes big square-edge hits extremely well, it doesn't squat too much and doesn't

bob on climbs, with good traction when you need it most. The

fork wasn't cut from the same cloth however, requiring some fettling to extract the best performance and, yet, still not at the same level as the rear suspension. It's



not a light bike either, so getting up to speed is a task, but once there it carries good momentum.

Did anything break or wear out?

Reliability has been the GT's biggest asset. The Shimano SLX brakes have been a highlight, and the SLX and XT drivetrain has been solid. I've been glad of the double chainset on numerous occasions, and the Shadow Plus clutch rear mech







HIGHS

- Dependable specification survived some tough riding and weather conditions.
- The Shimano SLX brakes are brilliant. I'll have these every time please.
- Long and low geometry provides great balance, happiest on steep, techy descents.



- I had to make too many changes in search of the bike's full potential.
- The fork was a pain. First short on travel and then not quite stiff enough.
- Despite the full carbon-fibre front end and swingarm, at a hair over 30lb with proper tyres, the Sensor is simply too heavy.

SPECIFICATION

Frame FOC Ultra Carbon, 130mm travel Shock Fox Float CTD

Performance
Fork RockShox
Revelation RL Solo Air,

Revelation RL Solo Air, 130mm travel Wheels All Terra sealed hubs, WTB

STi23 rims, Continental Mountain King/X-King 2.4in tyres **Drivetrain** Shimano

SLX 38/24t chainset, shifters and f-mech, XT Shadow Plus r-mech

Brakes Shimano SLX 180mm

Components RaceFace Ride 740mm bar and 70mm stem, WTB Silverado saddle, KS LEV Integra seatpost Sizes S. M. L. XI.

Weight 13.2kg (29.1lb)

GEOMETRY

Size tested L Head angle 68.5° Seat angle 73° BB height 339mm Chainstay 440mm Front centre 730mm Wheelbase 1,170mm

Down tube 670mm **Top tube** 631mm

keeps the chain on and the ride quiet. All the bearings — hubs, bottom bracket and headset — are still smooth after many miles and hammering through all weathers. Also, the rear shock is adequately protected by a neat mudguard.

If you could change one thing about your longtermer what would it be?

I'd change the fork in a heartbeat. Actually, it looks like GT has been listening to my feedback, because the 2016 model is specced with a stiffer Fox 34 fork with 140mm travel. Tyres have also swapped to Maxxis Ardents, and there's a new, lighter swingarm.

Would you buy this bike and why?

I really tried to love the Sensor, but I wouldn't say I gelled with it enough that I'd part with my own cash. Too many changes are needed off the bat, so even though

the GT is underpinned by impressive rear suspension and geometry, it needs to iron out a few of the gripes before it can really fly.







Ripping along a trail in the pitch black should be just as easy as during the day, but far more fun — if you've got the right lights set-up. We put six bar and helmet lights to the test

Words: Paul Burwell, Jamie Darlow Photos: Roo Fowler, Dan Gould

ombing around the woods in the dark, when everyone else is tucked up in front of the TV, may seem like a mad thing to do, but night riding is a great way of getting your weekly singletrack fix over the winter months.

Not only that; night riding can help improve your skills and invigorate even the most mundane trails, because they're much more challenging in the dark. Above all, it's just great fun, especially if you ride with a gang of mates.

To make the most of your night ride, you'll need proper high-powered lights, designed for off-road use. Buying a set of the best lights available will allow you to ride for as long as you do during the day, and almost as fast. We recommend buying two lights — one to fit to your handlebar, the other on your helmet.

The handlebar light needs the most power, for illuminating the trail in front of you, and the weaker helmet light will allow you to see over obstacles, round corners and fill in the shadows.

We'd combine both lights, for faster or technical trails, but we'd drop your main light to a low power

setting for easier trails, and then turn off the helmet light completely when climbing. This allows you to extend the run time of the weaker light, and the bar light will produce shadows on the trail, adding definition and texture. Being able to avoid all the roots and loose rocks when climbing means you won't lose traction or wheel spin.

The other reason we'd opt for separate lights is weight. You want the heavy light on the bar and the lighter unit on your helmet. Ideally the helmet light should be self-contained: lamp and battery in a single unit. It's more compact and you won't have a cable hanging down the back of your neck.

In this two-part test, we've picked six handlebar lights and six dedicated helmet lights, all similar in weight, light output and price. There's nothing to stop you mixing and matching brands, but sticking with a single make does mean you can share chargers and mounts.

THANKS TO

Exposure Lights for the use of its integrating sphere. For more details on the Exposure range, go to ultimatesportsengineering.com.

USED AND ABUSED

How we test

This year, to get an accurate idea of brightness, we measured all the lights' output in a lab. Manufacturers usually quote 'claimed' output, which is a theoretical figure based on the specification of the light's LED emitters. The real-world output, however, is almost always lower — and that's what we've measured for this test.

To allow accurate comparisons of beam pattern, we photographed all the lights on a trail at night. This lets you see the shape of beam and reveals any dark areas or hotspots.

All of the lights were then ridden back-toback on our test loop, over multiple nights, in varying conditions, from clear and starry to seriously rainy. A Hope R2i bar light was used with all the helmet lights and a Light and Motion Solite 250 with the bar lights.

JARGON BUSTER

Know your lights

POWER

Lumens is a measurement of light output — the higher the number the brighter the light. For this test, we've measured the actual output rather than the manufacturer's theoretical figure, for best possible accuracy.

BATTERY

All the batteries here are lithium ion, which means they don't require a specific charging regime — you can just top them up and run them down as necessary.

A fuel gauge is handy for measuring remaining life, but unnecessary on a helmet light, as you can't see this when riding.



BEAM PATTERN

Beam pattern is actually more significant to real-world performance on the trail than ultimate lumens. Hot spots and hard-focused lines at the edges of the beam are distracting, and make it more difficult to use peripheral vision when riding. Look for soft transitions and edges to the light. A pool of light around, and either side of the front wheel, is essential for slow, technical riding.





BAR MOUNTING

Rubber band attachments make life easier because lights can be removed quickly, without tools, expand to accommodate different bar diameters, and the lamp can be angled up or down relatively easily. Clamp-on mounts are better for heavy lights, because they're rattle-free and provide added security. Only two of the lights on test had mounts compatible with 35mm diameter bars.

REMOTE

You are more likely to use the different power levels at your disposal, and your battery lasts far longer, if you can toggle the settings quickly while riding. This needs to integrate with your controls, because if you have to move your hand to reach it, you may as well just use the on/off switch on the light.

CABLE

Long or short cable? The best option is both. Ideally a bar-mounted light should come with a short cable, for when the battery is on the stem or top tube, and a long cable to allow you to stuff it in your backpack, or pocket, and you're running the light up top on your helmet.

HELMET MOUNTING

Barring Exposure, which employs a fixed clamp, helmet mounts are held in place with twin Velcro straps that loop through the vents. Look for a low-profile unit for your helmet, as there will be less chance of catching it on overhanging branches. Angle adjustment allows you to tilt the light up and down.





EXPOSURE TORO MK7

SPECIFICATION Weight: 257g • Lumens: High 1.805, Medium 696, Low 355 • Run time: 2, 6, 12hrs • Contact: ultimatesportsengineering.

Like all Exposure lights, the Toro Mk7 is an all-inone unit, with the lamp and battery combined. It mounts to the bar using a neat machined clamp, available in 31.8 and 35mm diameters, that can be shimmed down using the spacers provided.

The Toro has several settings with the options printed on the body of the light, so you don't need to hunt for the instructions in the dark, and to make the process even easier, the Toro has a touch screen. There's also a digital readout on the back of the lamp that tells you what mode has been accessed. and also counts down remaining battery life. The pressure sensitivity takes a bit of getting used to, but you don't have to wear special gloves to access it.

One of the most interesting modes is the Reflex option, which automatically powers down the light when climbing to preserve battery life. It's a great feature on rides with lots of short, sharp climbs.

At 1,805 lumens, the Toro has more power than its claimed figure and is the second brightest light here. It is designed as a crossover light between road and off-road riding, so has a narrower, more focused beam. It produces a crisp white light, but lacks the coverage of the Light and Motion Seca 1500 and Magicshine MJ-880, especially around the front wheel.

We still rate the Toro though - it's light, the build quality is excellent and it has several usable modes that are simple to access. If you don't like the hassle of cables, or have space on your frame for a battery, this is the light to have.





GLOWORM XS

SPECIFICATION Weight: 393g • Lumens: High 1.916. Medium 1.133. Low 465 • Run time: 2, 4, 7hrs • Contact: ison-distribution.com

The XS is the latest light from New Zealand brand Gloworm. It has a machined aluminium lamp unit that holds three Cree XML-2 U2 LED emitters. and attaches centrally over the stem using an adjustable metal clamp. This only fits bars up to 31.8mm in diameter, but a 35mm option is coming later this year.

Gloworm's IMT (Intelligent Mode Technology) feature allows users to access two light modes. The default setting is Trail mode with high, medium and low beams, which can be personalised further to decrease brightness and increase run time, or vice versa. The Commute mode has high, medium, low and flashing, but they're all slightly lower powered. Being able to customise output and run time is a handy feature, but it does require a complicated sequence of clicks and presses to access.

The XS comes with a Lithium Ion Hard Case battery with a built-in fuel gauge and medium width strap to lash it to your frame. It also has a tethered remote that attaches to a plastic mount via small patch of Velcro. It allows you to adjust the light without taking your hand off the grip, but we'd like to see this integrate better with the controls. It also needs a longer cable, as this one looks like it is designed for narrow bars.

The XS is a lightweight system, but it's heavier than claimed and under-delivers on lumens. Gloworm is touting 2,200 lumens on full power,

but we measured it at 1.916. That said, it's still the brightest light on test and well-priced. The build quality is top-notch and it has a wide, deep spread and very usable medium and low beams.





HOPE R4+

SPECIFICATION Weight: 431g • Lumens: High 1.586, Medium 972, Low 378 • Run time: 2.5, 4, 6hrs • Contact: hopetech.com

The Hope R4+ is an updated version of the R4 LED we tested in the 2013 lights test. Improvements include 500 extra lumens, an illuminated power switch and battery with built-in fuel gauge.

Included in the box are three mounts — an elastic head harness, a Velcro helmet mount and a machined aluminium bar mount. The latter has a bayonet-style attachment, which allows you to remove the lamp quickly when not in use. This dog-leg design also means the Hope R4+ is one of only two lights here that can be positioned out in the front of the stem, freeing up bar space and eliminating shadows cast by the front wheel.

The battery now comes in a rubber case, but the strap included is a little thin, so it tended to rattle when riding bumpy terrain.

Like the old light, the Hope R4+ has two power sequences (Race and Trail), each with three light levels. The default setting is Race mode and we'd stick with this one as it offers max output and usable medium and low-power settings. Trail mode is accessed with a long press and has medium and low beams and a slightly annoying flashing option.

With its four high-powered LEDs, the R4+ produces good coverage at the sides and close in. It's not quite as wide reaching as the Seca, but it has a stronger, whiter light. In fact, the R4+ exceeded its claimed output when we measured it.

Like most of Hope's products, the R4+ is bombproof. It has the best clamp on test, comes with a stack of accessories, and the compact lamp unit is the only one here that works just as well on a helmet.







LIGHT AND MOTION SECA 1500

£299.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 305g • Lumens: High 1,379, Medium 733, Low 378 • Run time: 2, 3, 8hrs • Contact: madison.co.uk

This is a lower-powered version of last year's testwinning Seca 2000. It has an identical lamp unit, married to a lighter three-cell lithium ion battery, and is £100 cheaper.

The lamp fastens to the handlebars using a simple elastic strap with holes in it. This weighs next to nothing, allows you to direct the beam up and down, and also stretches to fit 35mm-diameter bars. The lamp unit also rotates side to side, which is good for getting the angle right, as it doesn't mount directly over the stem.

We've criticised the cable on the Seca lights in the past for being too long, and it's no different here. Admittedly, you could wind it round the frame, but that's messy and takes ages to do — we'd just like to see a shorter cable, or a coiled option.

By toggling the on/off button during start-up you can access one of two modes. Cruise mode has high, medium, low and flashing options, whereas Race mode just has high and low. We'd recommend the Race mode for off-road use, as it's much quicker to swap between the settings.

Although the Seca 1500 comes up a little short on claimed lumens, it doesn't feel underpowered. With six LEDs and a diffuser at the bottom of the lens, it has the best light spread. There's excellent fill-in round

the front wheel, plenty of illumination to the sides, and it also reaches pretty far down the trail. This is one of the few lights you could ride on its own, which makes it better value, as there's no need to splash out on a helmet light.





MAGICSHINE EAGLE M2 2400

£99.98

SPECIFICATION Weight: 467g • Lumens: High 1,737, Medium 1,074,

Magicshine's new Eagle M2 has six ultra-bright LEDs, with the three at the top projecting a spot beam, and the three on the bottom a wide flood. There are three light modes — you can run all six LEDs together or select between the two rows individually. On full power, the theoretical light output is 2,400 lumens, but we measured only 1,737. There are five settings in each mode, but the lower-power options are pretty dim and unusable off-road, registering barely 50 lumens.

Adjusting the brightness, and modes, can be done on the lamp itself or via an optional remote. The latter doesn't really integrate with any handlebar controls, and the rubber band attachment is a bit flimsy, which means the remote twists as you press it.

The lamp clips into a bolt-on clamp. It's a bit fiddly to install and lacks a 35mm option, but it's rattle-free. The battery is housed in a shaped plastic case and has rubber attachment straps, one of which broke off during the test.

The Eagle M2 creates a good pool of light close in around the wheel, which is great for technical riding, but it lacks the depth, so when tacklingO faster descents you will need to angle the light up by hand.

With its plastic hardware and construction, the

Eagle M2 doesn't feel as solid as other lights on test, and is a little underpowered. But at less than a £100, this light is absolutely killer value. If you're a night riding novice, this should be on your wish list.







ONE23 EXTREME BRIGHT DUO 2000

£159.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 500g • Lumens: High 818, Low 268 • Run time: 3, 9hrs • Contact: todayscyclist.co.uk

We've seen this light before under a different banner, but One23 calls it the Extreme Bright Duo 2000. The lamp is made from lightweight aluminium and gets an illuminated on/off switch. By pressing the switch you toggle through four settings — high and low beam, pulsing and off. There's no option to alter this sequence, which means the light will always turn off as you cycle fully through the options. We also found the Duo would start flashing randomly, and occasionally even shut down completely, despite being fully charged.

The Duo's LEDs give it a claimed output of 2,000 lumens, but it registered less than half that when we ran it through the sphere. The light is bright and it has good throw, but there's very little spread for technical riding.

What you do get with the Bright Duo is a load of fixtures and fittings — there are two bar clamps, a head mount and several clips to mount the light to a hat. Yes, a hat. The basic bar fitting uses a stretchy rubber band, which is lightweight, offers till adjustment and is easy to remove. The battery comes with a wide Velcro band, so you can get it really tight on the frame, but it's bulky and heavy — as a system the Duo is nearly double the weight of the Exposure.

The Duo is good value, and the light is bright and far-reaching, but it falls a long way short of its claimed lumens and we found it erratic. Hence we've rated it accordingly.







CATEYE VOLT 800

SPECIFICATION Weight: 159g • Lumens: High 715, Medium 370, Low

The Volt's gone up in power by 100 lumens from last year, but the price has stayed the same, which makes it a much more competitive light in this test. You still need to buy the helmet mount separately though, at £9.99. A spare battery and charging cradle are also available for £9.99 and £19.99 respectively.

The Volt fits easily to a helmet with a Velcro strap, which anchors it firmly with no wobble. It tucks in close to your head, too, so there's less to catch on low branches and it doesn't feel wobbly or act like a pendulum. The mount is spoilt slightly, though, because the angle adjustment isn't fine enough — it either points slightly too low or slightly too high.

There are five light modes, from high to flashing, dishing out a 715 lumens in a good, concentrated beam. It's not programmable though, so you have to cycle through all the modes rather than just toggling between high and low. The Volt is certainly very bright, it lasts well and charges quickly, but it was



ELECTRON F-650

SPECIFICATION Weight: 194g • Lumens: High 575, Low 275 • Run time:

The F-650 uses twin LEDs, which means one can act as a spot, to punch light far down the trail, and the other can flood the area around your front wheel. It does a decent job too, with enough light to pick out the trail when both beams are illuminated. There are two other settings, flood only, or flood with pulsing, both of which are best left for road use.

Electron is owned by Madison, which also distributes GoPro, so the supplied helmet mount is really just a POV camera mount. It's not great: ours came loose several times mid-descent, because there's no curve to the mount's base and there isn't enough rubber to make it deform to the shape of your helmet. If you can get the strap tight enough, the unit doesn't feel heavy or wobbly thanks to its low profile.

While other lights in this test have improved year-on-year, the Electron has stood still, meaning it feels underpowered compared to the competition. That said, it's still relatively cheap, is well made and comes with a helmet mount included in the box.



EXPOSURE JOYSTICK MK10

£139.95

SPECIFICATION Weight: 101g • Lumens: High 829, Medium 367, Low 207 • Run time: 1.5, 3, 5hrs • Contact: ultimatesportsengineering.com

The Joystick has been around for ages and it's easy to see why. The fitting system beats everything else hands down: a ball-and-socket style cradle mount attaches through the vents of your helmet, holding the light steady and offering infinite adjustment. It's also easy to whip out of its cradle, allowing you to use it as a torch if required.

The Joystick has programmable settings, so you can choose the sequence of power-modes and associated run times to suit your riding. This updated Mark 10 Joystick delivers more than its claimed 800 lumens, making it the most powerful helmet light on test, alongside the Volt. The beam pattern is good too, focused enough to fire down the trail, but with sufficient spill for peripheral light too.

The Joystick is the lightest of our six headlamps, has the most power, features the best mount, charges quickly and lasts a good amount of time. It's expensive, but easily worth the extra £40 over the similarly-powered Volt.





frustrating that we could never

get the angle adjustment right.



LEZYNE MACRO DRIVE 600 XL LOADED

£69.99

SPECIFICATION Weight: 173g • Lumens: High 524, Medium 320, Low 193, Extra low 19 • Run time: 1.3, 3, 7hrs • Contact: upgradebikes.co.uk

The Macro Drive is made from extruded and machined aluminium, housing twin LEDs. The Loaded title means it comes with a helmet mount, as well as the standard bar mount and hardshell box. Curiously though, you have to use the rubber bar mount to attach the light to its helmet mount, piggy-backing it on top. It's very secure but it means the light sticks up above your helmet by 30mm more than it needs to and, together with the extra rubber, makes the unit feel a touch heavy and pendulous.

There are two light modes to choose from; Economy has four fixed beam settings, a pulse and a flash mode - all selected by holding down the on/off button — and Race Mode (our choice when testing), which lets you toggle between a high and low beam.

The beam is well-focused with enough power to pick out details in the trail. It's not crazypowerful, but it's hard to ignore the incredible value. At half the price of the Exposure, it's only let down by the high-slung mount.





LUPINE NEO 2

SPECIFICATION Weight: 189g • Lumens: High 710, Medium 318, Low 33 • Run time: 2.15, 4.3, 50hrs • Contact: leveretproductions.con

Lupine's Neo 2 is the only light on test that separates out the light unit from the battery. The advantage being that you can get the light really low on your helmet. And while it's the heaviest light here, its proximity to the helmet means it still feels stable.

The strap holding the battery could be better though — it only runs in one direction, meaning the battery's alignment is determined by the venting on vour helmet, which can be awkward.

There are five programmable modes and six additional options, like Battery High mode that gives you a flat battery warning earlier than normal. We set the Neo to toggle between maximum (710 lumens) and minimum power (33 lumens) only, and set the battery low, on power-saver mode, to come on later.

The light has a focused spot with a good spread around the edges but it's not as powerful as the less expensive Volt and Joystick. That said, the build quality is excellent, as is the support - Lupine offers a battery trade-in, with 20 per cent

off, and you can upgrade the light's LED board if something new and more powerful comes along.



NITERIDER LUMINA 750

SPECIFICATION Weight: 176g • Lumens: High 758, Medium 423, Low 246 • Run time: 1.3, 3, 5.3hrs • Contact: 2pure.co.ul

Ever had unwanted discharge? Never again with the Lumina — hold the on button for seven seconds and it'll lock, meaning it won't come on accidentally in your bag. Another seven-second press unlocks it. That's about as complicated as it gets: the Lumina has three power modes, but you can't program it to do anything more, or even come on automatically in the brightest setting. The helmet mount will cost you an extra £11.99 and uses two nylon straps that loop through your helmet vents and lock tight, to create a decent, low profile, mount.

The Lumina has a focused beam, that pumps light further down the trail than its 758 lumen count would suggest. The light is white and clear, rather than yellow and seems to give better definition but a halo around the edge is distracting on wider, faster trails where the beam shape becomes more noticeable. It also turns on in the low setting, which is annoying, because you have to toggle

through to high beam each time.



Verdict

f you're new to night riding, we recommend combining a bar light as your main light with a helmet light to fill in the details. You can use any of the lights in our two tests like that, but some are better than others.

All of the helmet lights are close in weight and output, but the Electron F-650 seems to be treading water this year and is a little bulky. The Niterider also remains unchanged, and while it has some interesting electronics, it also has the worst beam pattern. The Cateye Volt is bright, but the ratchet on the helmet mount either points too far up or too far down. The mount is also an issue on the Lezyne MacroDrive, but this time it's too tall. The Lupine Neo 2 is the only headlight with a separate battery, and it offers the most clearance, but you still notice the weight and it's pricy.

bangs out the lumens and is low profile.

This perfectly describes the Exposure Joystick.

When testing the bar lights, we chose six lights with similar specifications, although the real world outputs differed considerably. The One23 Extreme Bright Duo has a bright white light, but the weight and inconsistent performance counted against it, not to mention the price. What

much more usable beam and light spread, and while there are a couple of issues with the bracket, remote and battery pack, if you want to night ride on a budget, this is the system we'd recommend.

Three lights claimed runner-up spot in this half of the draw, and we would happily use any of them as our main light. The Exposure Toro MK7 has a slightly narrower, focused beam, but it's light, bright and superbly made. Hope's new R4+ has a wider beam that's better for riding trails, and the commuter option is hidden away as a secondary mode. It's solid and hard-wearing, but do you really need to spend another £100 on the R8, the Hope light we tested 12 months ago?

Probably

The Gloworm light is very similar to the Hope, with a machined lamp unit, offset bar mount and rubberised battery case. The Gloworm XS does get a bit more power, and has a handy remote switch, but accessing the different modes is a complicated process that a lot of riders probably won't bother with.

All of which leaves the Light and Motion Seca 1500. We didn't really want to give it best on test again this year, but it's probably the only handlebar unit that can be used without a helmet light. A shorter cable and a proper fuel gauge would be the icing on the cake, but even without them it has the best beam and the most usable light.



BAR MOUNTED	Price	Weight	Measured lumens	Run time	Rating
Exposure Toro MK7	£274.95	257g	1,805, 696, 355	2, 6, 12hrs	(9)
Gloworm XS	£239.99	393g	1,916, 1,133, 465	2, 4, 7hrs	(9)
Hope R4 +	£240	431g	1,586, 972, 378	2.5, 4, 6hrs	(9)
Light & Motion Seca 1500	£299.99	305g	1,379, 733, 378	2, 3, 8hrs	(1)
Magicshine Eagle M2	£99.98	467g	1,737, 1074, 697	2, 3, 7hrs	8
One23 Extreme Bright Duo	£159.99	500g	818, 268	3, 9hrs	B
HELMET MOUNTED					
Cateye Volt 800	£99.99	159g	715, 370, 153	2, 3.5, 8hrs	8
Electron F-650	£69.99	194g	575, 275	2.5, 5hrs	1
Exposure Joystick Mk10	£139.99	101g	829, 367, 207	1.5, 3, 5hrs	(1)
Lezyne MacroDrive 600XL	£69.99	173g	524, 320, 193, 19	1.5, 3, 7hrs	8
Lupine Neo 2	£150	189g	710, 318, 33	2.15, 4.3, 50hrs	1
Niterider Lumina 750	£80	176g	758, 423, 246	1.3, 3, 5.3hrs	8

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Ш попопенен.

OUR PRICE £1399 0% *Example £151 deposit + 24 payments of £52

CLOCKWORK 100 29ER (*29ER S)



CLOCKWORK 120 27.5" (*27.5" S)











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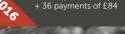
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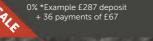




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CHARGE COOKER 2

£999.99



SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER FSR COMP 6FATTIE

£2,500



TREK STACHE 9 29+

£2,700

BIKE TEST

lus bikes promise
to deliver more
traction, more
control and more
comfort. They're
being billed as the
next big thing in
trail riding, and
all the key brands
are jumping on the fat-tyre
bandwagon. This month, we take
a closer look at what the latest
wheel size trend has to offer.
Before we do that, however,

let's make one thing crystal clear:
Plus bikes aren't just for plus-size riders.
That's because the Plus part actually refers to the tyre width, not the size or strength of the bike. To confuse matters further,
Plus bikes come in two distinct flavours:
27.5 Plus and 29 Plus, both rocking tyre widths in the range of 2.8in to 3.0in. That's compared to regular 2.2-2.3in models commonly found on most current bikes.

For now though, we've got two new wheel sizes in the mix. Unsurprisingly, they come with their own unique set of design issues and standards. The key one being the wider Boost hub and dropout interface that is necessary for increased tyre clearance. While no one likes new standards, especially ones that aren't backward compatible, Boost looks set to become the norm on all bikes, as the extra hub spacing also allows for stronger wheels.

Is the upheaval worth it? Well, if manufacturers' claims of increased traction and control are to be believed, the fatter Plus tyres sound like they could catch on. There are still plenty of unanswered questions though. Such as, are they just for beginner riders? How soft can you run the tyre without puncturing? Is there an increase in the rolling resistance, and can they cope with mud?

To help answer these questions, and get a feel for the whole 'bigger is better' tyre concept, we've got a cross-section of Plus wheel size bikes on test this month. The Charge Cooker 2 is a no-nonsense hardtail with 27.5 Plus wheels that costs £999.99. Next in order of price is the Specialized Stumpjumper FSR Comp 6Fattie at £2,500. It's basically a 27.5 Plus version of the classic 29er Stumpy. Rounding out our trio of big tyre trail bikes is the biggest of all, the Trek Stache 9 29+ at £2,700. This unique hardtail combines 29 Plus wheels, and a cutting-edge frame design, that promises sharp handling and monster truck rollover capabilities.

Three very unique bikes indeed, but will bigger really prove to be better, or can you simply have too much of a good thing? Let's find out...





WHERE AND HOW

Tale of the test

Trying to look beyond wheel size, price or suspension, we simply took these three bikes trail riding. Up in Yorkshire, that means anything from old-school moorland bridleways to man-made trail centres with armoured surfaces, straight out of the back door. For a change of pace, we also dipped into hand-cut tracks in the woods, that were either steep and loamy, or dark and slippy, depending on the weather. A good mix, then, to test our three Plus bikes to the max.



WHERE AND HOW

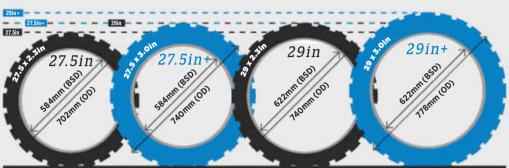
Plus size tech explained

WHEEL SIZE

It sounds obvious, but it's important to understand that wheel size is a product of rim diameter and tyre width. Fit a 2.0in tyre, or a 2.5in tyre, to the same rim and you get two different wheel sizes. Taken to the extreme, this is in essence what Plus wheel sizes are all about. Plus size wheels use rims with the same diameter as regular 27.5in and 29in rims, but the massive 2.8-3.0in tyres give two new wheel sizes that require dedicated frames and forks. Given that one tyre manufacturer's 2.8in tyre can look more like a 2.6in, while others have profiles that measure up closer to 3.0in, there's a lot of variation between brands.

RIMS

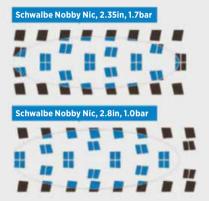
Fatter tyres need wider rims for extra support. Most Plus size bikes go well beyond the 29mm internal rim width found on the Specialized 6Fattie: the Trek Stache 9 29+ has 50mm wide rims while Charge's Cooker rolls on custom rims with 40mm separating the bead hooks. So, even though the Plus size rim diameters are the same as 27.5in and 29in, the rim widths need to increase in proportion to the tyre width.



BIGGER CONTACT PATCH

According to Schwalbe, a 2.8in Nobby Nic at 15psi has a 21 per cent bigger contact patch than a 2.35in Nobby Nic at 25psi. More rubber on the ground equates to more grip, and with all other things being equal, wider tyres with more air volume should let you run lower inflation pressures while still providing the same level of support. Unfortunately, things aren't equal. To stop the weight of the bigger tyres from

creeping up, tyre manufacturers are using thinner casings, with less rubber. In practical terms this means you can't run some Plus size tyres as soft as you think, as they have less inherent support and damping. It also means that the sidewalls are more prone to cuts and will degrade more quickly. The bottom line is that, while tyre construction is important on any bike, it's going to prove even more critical on Plus bikes.



BOOST

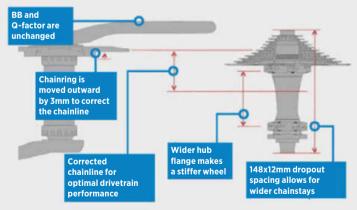
Trek's Stache rolls on

the fattest rubber in test,

in Chupacabra tyres

Before we dismiss Boost as yet another exercise in obsolescence, let's take a closer look at the advantages. By increasing fork dropout spacing from 100x15mm to 110x15mm, the hub flange spacing can be increased by 10mm. This reduces the spoke angle relative to the hub, resulting in stiffer, stronger wheels. On the rear it's a similar story, only this time it's only a 6mm improvement as the dropout spacing grows from 142x12mm to 148x12mm. The extra width of Boost dropouts was necessary for the additional clearance required by the wide 3.0in tyres. And painful as progress can be, Boost will ultimately be better for all bikes, as stiffer, stronger wheels are an advantage.

If you've been paying attention, you've probably worked out that if you increase the rear hub spacing,



and move the hub flanges further apart, the cassette has to move further outboard and this will mess up your chain line. Fortunately, crank manufacturers are on board with the Boost standard too, so companies like SRAM are producing dedicated chainrings, with 3mm extra offset, that shifts the chain

ring further away from the BB. This corrects the chain line without the need to change the BB standard or crank spacing. Bolt-on spiders and single ring designs have made this the least painful step in the shift to Plus-size tyres. Also, the wider chain line is needed so the chain actually clears the tyre.





CHARGE COOKER 2

£999.99

SPECIFICATION

Frame Charge butted 6061 aluminium Fork SR Suntour Raidon 650b Plus, 100mm travel

Wheels Charge Disc hubs 110/135mm, Charge Midi Rims, WTB Trailblazer 2.8in Dual DNA tyres

Drivetrain: FSA Comet chainset, 32T ring, Shimano SLX shifter and r-mech (10-speed) **Brakes:** Tektro HDC-

Components: RaceFace Ride seatpost, Charge saddle, RaceFace Evolve 725mm bar, Charge Lite 85mm stem Sizes: S, M, L, XL Weight: 12.9kg (28.4lb) Contact: chargebikes.

GEOMETRY

Size tested L Head angle 70° Seat angle 74.1° BB height 325mm Chainstay 435mm Front centre 710mm Wheelbase 1,145mm Down tube 702mm Top tube 623mm Reach 431mm id-fat, Fat-lite or 27.5 Plus; call it whatever you want, Charge has gone all-in on the new wheel size for 2016. And it wasn't a half-baked decision, either. Only after extensive back-to-back testing, on frames with three different wheel options (29in, 27.5in and 27.5 Plus), was Charge fully sold on the benefits of the latest wheel size.

Previously, the UK brand hadn't joined the rush for ever-shorter chainstays on its 29er hardtails, but with the slightly smaller 27.5 Plus wheels and the space saved by ditching the front mech and any provision to fit one, Charge has now shortened the back end by 15mm. It has also lengthened the front end, to reflect current sizing trends.

It hasn't adopted every Plus size standard, however. Yes, the new alloy frame has wider stays to clear the bigger tyres, but the rear quick-release dropouts still use 135mm spacing. While other brands have adopted the wider Boost 148 option, which allows for an increase in hub flange spacing and a stiffer rear wheel, it's a decision that makes sense on a £1,000 hardtail as it helps keep costs in check.

SUSPENSION

Taking care of suspension duties is a 100mm-travel Suntour Raidon fork. It's air-sprung, and unlike the frame, it gets a wider 110mm Boost chassis to accommodate the fatter tyres. Suntour isn't a household suspension name, but the Raidon is stiff, with decent damping performance. Alongside rebound adjustment, there's a lockout lever for climbing, and the 15mm axle is secured with an expanding wedge that helps further increase torsional stiffness. One bugbear is

the fork developed a knocking sound after the fourth or fifth ride. We couldn't track down the cause of the issue, which leaves a question mark over durability.

COMPONENTS

Charge's Plus-specific 40mm wide rims ride stiff and provide plenty of support for the WTB 2.8in Trailblazer tyres, even at super low pressures. And hats off to Charge for being one of the few manufacturers to sell its bikes set up tubeless, saving around 400g of rotating weight and making the tyres more resistant to pinch flats.

As a utility hardtail, the 1x drivetrain suits the low-maintenance, non-nonsense outlook, and the clutch mechanism on the SLX rear derailleur stops the chain jumping off. The lowest of the 10 gears on offer is 32/36t, so even fit riders will find the Cooker hard work on steep pitches and long, draggy ascents where you really want to be spinning rather than grinding.

The Tektro brakes have good modulation but they aren't very powerful, and the long, old-fashioned lever blades make it more difficult to find the sweet spot for one-finger operation.

PERFORMANCE

The Plus size Cooker feels surprisingly light and nimble. The biggest difference is that the 2.8in WTB tyres add an extra level of comfort and control. It's very efficient too — the tyres' central ridge rolls rapidly on firm ground, while the high volume rolls smoothly over bumps and greatly aids climbing traction.

Bridleways and mellow trails are dispatched easily on the Cooker. Venture onto steeper, more natural trails, however, and the more adventure-focussed attitude means you have to go with the flow, instead of stepping on the gas. Knocking the Cooker's confidence is the combination of a long stem and a steep head angle. It kind of balances the steering out on flowing trails, but doesn't leave you positioned, or primed, to squeeze all the grip and control from that super-wide rubber when charging.

Another limiting factor is how poor the WTB Trailblazer tyres perform on roots, mud and slime. With just a central 'Mohawk' tread, and bulging sidewalls, the tyres float across wet patches, feel dicey when cornering and, even though they are super wide, you still get wheel spin when climbing on damp ground.

VERDICT

There's no denying that the Charge Cooker 2 is a comfy, mild-mannered hardtail. It rolls fast too, even with the 27.5 Plus-size tyres, and it's easy to control on mellow trails. After a month of testing, however, we're still not sure where the Cooker truly excels.

The latest 'gravel' road bikes could cover most gentle bridleway and towpath duties faster and more efficiently, while something like the full-suspension Calibre Bossnut would be far more capable on 'proper' mtb terrain for the same money. OK, the Plus

money. OK, the Plus components add cost, but for £1,000 there are better bikes out there to cut your teeth on.









SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER FSR COMP 6FATTIE

£2,500

SPECIFICATION

Frame M5 Alloy, 135mm travel Shock Fox Float Performance DPS w/ Autosag Fork Fox 34 Plus Performance, 150mm

Wheels Roval Traverse alloy, Specialized 6Fattie Purgatory/ Ground Control 27.5x3in tyres Drivetrain SRAM GX-

1000 28T, SRAM GX shifter and mech

Brakes Shimano Deore, 180mm

Components Specialized Command Post IR, BG Henge saddle, XC stem 60mm, Specialized 750mm bar Sizes S, M, L, XL Weight 14.1kg (31.1lb) Contact specialized.com

GEOMETRY

Size tested L Head angle 66.9° Seat angle 68.4° BB height 328mm Chainstay 437mm Front centre 749mm Wheelbase 1,186mm Down tube 723mm Top tube 431mm Reach 431mm s one of only a handful of Plus-size full-suspension bikes that are available right now, Specialized certainly can't be accused of napping, as it did with the 650b standard. How has it managed to react so quickly to the latest development in wheel and tyre sizing? Only having to build a new rear end has certainly helped...

OK, that's an over-simplification but the 6Fattie does share the M5 alloy front triangle with the Stumpjumper FSR 29, even if the 3in tyres and unique handling qualities mean the ride is a real departure from any 'conventional' Stumpy.

It's the only Stumpy at present to run 148 Boost dropouts and a corresponding rear hub. The stays flanking the 3in tyre mirror its proportions, and the back end feels every bit as stout as it looks. If you ride flat pedals, however, or have big feet, your shoes will brush the short, burly stays.

SUSPENSION

Fox has really turned its 34 forks around; the latest generation is supple, supportive and, best of all, set-and-forget. The wide stance 34 Plus version, adorning the Stumpy Comp 6Fattie, sports 150mm of travel and increased offset to help keep the steering light and responsive.

Out back, the Stumpy 6Fattie has 135mm of smooth, well-controlled travel, just like the regular 29er version. Setup on the Fox shock couldn't be easier, thanks to Specialized's clever pump-andrelease Autosag feature, and with three



compression settings, you can instantly firm up the rear suspension for climbing, or open it up to blast the descents.

COMPONENTS

Regular Roval rims, with a 29mm internal width, keep rotating weight down, but it's

debatable if they are actually wide enough to fully exploit the ability of the Plus size tyre to run lower pressures. We found that at pressures under 17psi (5psi more than the other bikes with wider rims), the 6Fattie tyres had a significant amount of casing roll when cornering hard.



by the narrower Royal rim. In their favour, Specialized 3in tyres have a very rounded profile, that provides predictable cornering grip, even when the bike is really cranked over hard

PERFORMANCE

It's easy to forget that there's an extremely capable and well-suspended machine beneath you when you're focusing so closely on tyre performance. Take a step back from the super-sized world of 3in rubber for a minute, however, and it's clear that the suspension and handling of the Stumpy 6Fattie are everything you'd expect from a refined, modern trail bike. Sure-footed, capable and incredibly easy to ride, the 6Fattie is a real hoot. The sizing is spot-on too, and, thanks to the cushioning effect of the bulbous 3in tyres, you get the impression of having more suspension at your disposal than there actually is.

You don't pay too much of a weight penalty, either, as it's only fractionally heavier than the similarly-priced Stumpy Comp Evo 29 we tested last year.

Yes, the 3in tyres feel a little draggy at slower speeds, but since pedalling up the most technical climbs is easier, due to the massive amount of traction, over the course head of steam, but there's always a massive feeling of security to keep it in check. With more grip on tap, you can also brake later and get cocky with line choice without ever feeling like you'll be penalised too harshly.

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. The catch here being that the wider tyres don't like muddy, or boggy conditions. They can't handle ruts and tend to float sketchily on top of mud and standing water. We also think the Stumpy really needs a wider rim to make the most of the fatter tyres.

VERDICT

While the Stumpjumper Comp 6Fattie is more sluggish than bikes with regular tyres, climbing traction is a revelation and this largely makes up for the slightly less responsive ride elsewhere. The Stumpy is still a blast to bounce around on (literally), and it's stacks of fun on the right terrain. It's playful, it's planted on steep descents, and the massive grip levels improve balance and braking, making it really sure-footed over rocks and roots. Given that you're getting the latest tech at a fair price, the Stumpy 6Fattie offers some significant advantages while also keeping entertainment levels high. Just don't expect it to cut through mud.

modify chainline

The Stumpy generation

game: old front triangle

eets new fat rear end



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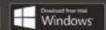


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TREK STACHE 9 29+

£2,700

SPECIFICATION

Frame Trek Alpha Platinum aluminium Fork Manitou Magnum 34 Pro, 110mm travel Wheels DT Swiss 350 hubs, Sun Ringlé Mulefût 50 rims, Bontrager Chupacabra 29x3.0in tyres Drivetrain SRAM X1 S-1400, X1 shifter and mech

Brakes Shimano XT, 180mm

Components KS eThirty Integra dropper, Bontrager Evoke RXL saddle, Bontrager Rhythm Pro carbon bar 760mm, Rhythm Pro 80mm stem.

Sizes 15.5, 17.5, 18.5, 19.5, 21.5in

Weight 13kg (28.7lb)
Contact trekbikes.com

GEOMETRY

Size tested 19.5in Head angle 68.4° Seat angle 69.5° BB height 319mm Chainstay 410-418mm Front centre 714mm Wheelbase 1,124-1,132mm Down tube 723mm Top tube 624mm

Reach 436mm

rek has never been afraid to
experiment with alternative wheel
sizes. The Stache 9 29+, however,
takes this open-minded approach
to a whole new level, with 3in tyres,
mounted on 50mm wide 29er rims and
slotted into ultra-short chainstays.

The monster-truck tweaks also include wider Boost 110 and 148 dropout spacing, to accommodate those bulbous treads. And while it's a beautifully-made frame, with extensively sculpted aluminium tubing, at £2,700, it's definitely an expensive hardtail.

The Stache makes its remarkably short chainstays possible by eliminating the front mech, and pairing an elevated driveside chainstay with scooped-out seat tube. They're so short, in fact, that the rear axle sits just 410mm behind the BB when in the forward dropout setting, even with huge 3in Chupacabra tyres.

SUSPENSION

Being Boost, the Manitou Magnum's 15mm axle is 10mm wider than usual, and the fork offset has also been increased to 51mm to sharpen the handling. As such, the steering feels totally natural, even though the footprint of the tyre is of Sasquatch proportions. Stiffness, damping and tracking on the 110mm travel Manitou are on-the-money too, but even though we've used Manitou's 15mm HexLock axle several times before, we still can't get it tight first time, every time.

COMPONENTS

You'd expect killer components on a £2,700 hardtail, and they're largely delivered, but the X1 series isn't SRAM's highest-tier 1x11 drivetrain and adds grams as a result.





Tyres get destroyed in rocky terrain and it's bloody expensive

This bike is all about the tyres, though, and with lower pressures, a giant contact patch. aggressive tread and good rubber compound, the 3in

Chupacabras have tenacious hold. The casing is relatively thin, to save weight, so it's easily damaged, and offers little in the way of pinch-flat protection. The Chupacabras worked best with pressures as low as 12psi, as this stopped the tyres from bouncing uncontrollably, while still ironing out the trail effectively. Run them any softer and the tyres squirm too much, accelerating sidewall wear further. Still, they bring a completely new level of braking control and balance to a hardtail.

PERFORMANCE

The Stache is seriously confidenceinspiring. So much so that you often need to remind yourself to tap the powerful Shimano XT brakes and rein it in. Climbing or descending, grip levels are off the scale, and once those big wheels start motoring, it takes a surprising amount of nerve to push the Trek out of its comfort zone.

The super-short chainstays make it a breeze to manual, and the bike feels surprisingly nimble, even though the wheels are massive. Leaning into corners feels a bit like skiing - just stand upright, trust the front tyre grip, steer from the hips and the rear wheel follows tightly behind. In loam, dry dirt or loose gravel, there's grip for ever, and the Stache can absolutely rail turns

once you acclimatise to how stable the fatter tyres ride.

It definitely requires more effort to lean it over, and in that respect the Stache feels like a more pronounced version of how a regular 29er rides. It's no buzz kill, though, and the safety net of the Velcro-like traction means you can chuck the Stache around the trail with reckless abandon, and this makes it seriously good fun to ride.

Overall, rolling resistance feels marginally higher than a 'standard' 29er going up or along flat singletrack, and the first few cranks always feel lost dragging the wheels up to speed. There's a tipping point, however, at which resistance morphs into momentum and the Stache hammers through all but the roughest terrain. It's then that the concept begins to make a lot more sense and becomes a lot more fun.

VERDICT

The Trek Stache 9 is a radical departure from trail hardtail tradition, but it's certainly no fat bike. Instead, it's a bold reinvention that's paid off big time. Despite having the tallest, widest tyres on test, once up to speed, clever engineering and geometry ensure the Stache is an incredibly fast, fun bike that's somehow almost BMX-like in its playfulness. Sure, the 29 Plus wheel size isn't without inherent compromises — tyre weight and durability being the key ones. It also has questionable credentials in wet, muddy conditions, but we challenge anyone who loves mountain biking to ride the Stache and not come away impressed.



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Conclusion

ike it or not, the new Boost hub and dropout standard is here to stay. And given that it makes for stronger wheels, rather than simply rendering your current parts obsolete, it's easy to predict that Boost will quickly become the new norm on most frames and forks. That doesn't automatically mean they will be Plus-size tyre compatible, though.

The big question is whether or not the Plus-size tyres themselves are ready? It's clear from testing our three Plus bikes that more rubber on the trail brings some serious, err, pluses. Most notably, the huge increase in climbing traction makes life easier for all riders. Get the balance of rim width, tyre casing and inflation pressure right and Plus-size tyres can be more comfortable too, offering a much larger safety net of increased grip and stability. So whether you're just starting out or pushing the envelope at DH speeds, Plussize tyres definitely bring performance gains to the table.

The flip-side is that the compromises are numerous too. There's a very small window of optimum air pressure: under-inflate them and the tyres deform too easily; too high and they just bounce around. This is mostly just because the majority of tyre manufacturers use flimsy, thin casings to keep the weight from creeping up. Your only option, then, is to use higher air pressure for support.

This lightweight approach also means the bigger tyres are easily damaged in the very environment they excel in: dry, rocky terrain. If Plus is to prove more versatile. tyres really need to get tougher, better damped and more capable in the wet — and it's going to require significant, unavoidable added weight with current tyre technology.

But what about the bikes themselves?



Charge has correctly concluded that WTB's supple, 2.8in tyres, when run at lower pressures, can soften up a hardtail. The fastrolling tread also ensures that the Cooker 2 motors along like most 29ers, while throwing extra traction into the mix. Bolting on Plus-size wheels doesn't suddenly make for a ripping bike, though, and the steeper steering geometry of the Cooker frame doesn't really capitalise on the confidence the fatter tyres offer. Ultimately, the Cooker

2 feels perfectly happy out and about on gentle trails and bridleways rather than on rough or sculpted MTB tracks.

At the opposite end of the Plus hardtail spectrum, the Trek Stache 9 29+ pushes the big-tyre concept furthest, with more rollover, grip and momentum. With its well-engineered frame, the 29 Plus wheels are a revelation on the Stache. It has the ability to gobble up anything, a trait that raised more than just a smile; it actually had

RANGE FINDER

Stumpjumper, for more or less...

SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER FSR CARBON **EXPERT 6FATTIF**

£4.800

It's over two-grand more than the Comp 6 Fattie, and still not the rangetopping Plus-sized Stumpy! Still, if you're sold on the oversized tyre

machine. The carbon front triangle saves weight and has the SWAT Door to stash your bits. You also get the lowfriction, high bling factor Kashima coating on the fork legs, Shimano XT brakes and an upgraded carbon SRAM chainset.



SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER **FSR COMP 29**

£2,200

With fast-everywhere 29in wheels and a proven pedigree, the 2016 Stumpy FSR 29 is an amazing bike for the money. It shares the same M5 alloy front

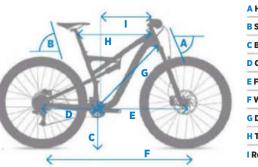
triangle with the 6Fattie version. but costs £300 less. Yes, the drivetrain is cheaper 2x10-speed you'll trade the Fox 34 fork for a less sturdy RockShox Revelation, and you don't get the new Boost 148 rear end, but it's still the trail bike to beat.





ANGLE FINDER

How the geometry compares



160	Charge	Specialized	Trek
A Head angle	70°	66.9°	69°
B Seat angle	74.1°	68.4°	70°
C BB height	325mm	328mm	318mm
D Chainstay	435mm	437mm	420mm
E Front centre	710mm	749mm	715mm
F Wheelbase	1,145mm	1,186mm	1,135mm
G Down tube	702mm	723mm	720mm
H Top tube	622mm	616mm	624mm
l Reach	431mm	431mm	436mm

SPECIFICATION

Vital statistics compared

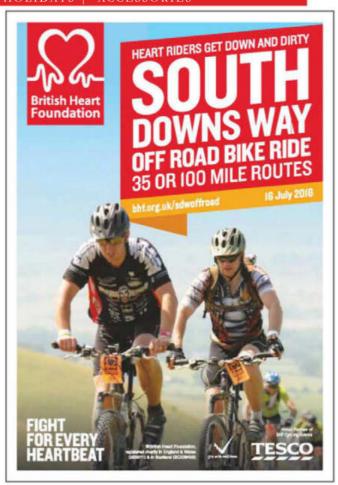
Make/model	Charge Cooker 2	Specialized Stumpjumper FSR Comp 6Fattie	Trek Stache 9 29+
Price	£999.99	£2,500	£2,700
Weight	12.9kg (28.4lb)	14.1kg (31.1lb)	13.4g (29.2lb)
Contact	chargebikes.com	specialized.com	trekbikes.com
FRAME			
Sizes	S, M, L, XL	S, M, L, XL	15.5, 17.5, 18.5, 19.5, 21.5in
Size tested	L	L	19.5in
Frame material	6061 aluminium	M5 aluminium	Alpha Platinum aluminium
Suspension fork	SR Suntour Raidon LO-R	Fox 34 Plus Performance	Manitou Magnium 34 Pro
Rear shock	N/A	Fox Float Performance DPS	N/A
Front travel	100mm	150mm	110mm
Rear travel	N/A	135mm	N/A
WHEELS			
Hubs	Charge Disc 110/135mm	Roval Traverse Boost 110/148mm	DT Swiss 350 Boost 110/148mm
Rims	Charge SOAC 650b 40mm	Roval Traverse 650b 30mm	Sunringle Mulefut 29 50mm
Spokes	Stainless	DT Swiss	DT Swiss
Tyres	WTB Trailblazer 650bx2.8in	Specialized 6Fattie Purgatory/ Ground Control 650bx3.0in	Bontrager Chupacabra 29x3.0in
GROUPSET			
Shifters	Shimano SLX	SRAM GX	SRAM X1
Front mech	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rear mech	Shimano SLX	SRAM GX	SRAM X1
Crank	FSA Comet 32T	SRAM GX-1000 28T	SRAM X1 1400 30T
Bottom bracket	FSA	SRAM PF30	SRAM GXP
Brakes	Tektro HDC-330	Shimano Deore	Shimano XT
Rotor sizes	180/160mm	180mm	180mm
COMPONENTS			
Saddle	Charge Spoon	BG Henge Comp	Bontrager Evoke RXL
Seatpost	RaceFace Ride 27.2mm	Command Post IRcc 125mm	KS eThirty Integra
Handlebar	RaceFace Evolve 725mm	Specialized 750mm	Bontrager Rhythm Pro 760mm
Stem	Charge Lite 85mm	Specialized 60mm	Bontrager Rhythm Pro 80mm
Rating	1	9	8

us laughing out loud. It's easily one of the best hardtails we've tested, but at £2,700 it wouldn't be our first choice for a one-bike stable. Luckily, you can still get most of the benefits, with only a small weight penalty, if you opt for the Stache 7 29+ for £1.800.

Specialized claims that 27.5 Plus is "the future of trail riding", but with relatively narrow 29mm rims and a 29er front end, it has really only dipped its toe in the waters. That doesn't stop the Stumpjumper Comp 6Fattie being a whole heap of fun, though, and on certain terrain there were instances when the level of grip and control were off the scale.

When you're not grinning at the new lines you can hit, and risks you can take, the Stumpy 6Fattie can feel a little sluggish, especially when compared to a regular 29er full-susser. Also, what are you going to do in mud? As yet, there aren't any 27.5 Plus mud tyres, but you probably could get away with running regular high-volume tyres such as the Schwalbe Magic Mary or WTB Vigilante. The Plus-size frame and fork will provide all the clearance you'll need, and they'd be a good match for the 29mm wide rims. So what initially struck us as a bit of a compromise could in fact make the Stumpy FSR Comp 6Fattie a more versatile option.

Ultimately, it will be you — the end user - who decides whether Plus bikes catch on in the UK. There's no denying that they have potential, but only after spending a full British winter on them will we know for sure if they really are the next big thing.







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Our favourite people choose their favourite photos





From working at a bike shop in Llandegla, Laurence has forged a successful career as a photographer and videographer. He spent 2013-2014 on the World Cup circuit with team Madison-Saracen. This summer he won the people's choice award for the Deep Summer photo challenge at Crankworx in Whistler.

hen I am asked to pick my favourite photo, I always find it tough to choose between an image I like aesthetically, or the one that gives me the best memories. This is one that just makes me giggle inside when I think about it.

My good friend Duane Walker and I were asked to explore the best riding areas of Snowdonia in search of the ultimate Welsh cover shot for a trail guide book. Where better than Snowdon — the biggest mountain in Wales? We figured this could be done easily, with minimal effort, planning or preparation, as it's in our backyard. So we loaded the tents into the car, borrowed a demo bike from Oneplanet Adventure, bought a fresh Dakine jersey — so at least Duane looked the part — and headed off into the hills.

Inspired by Canadian freeride movies, we spent the evening scouting potential lines and angles, and set up camp feeling good about the day to come.

I woke to the sound of rain slashing against the side of the tent. Guess who forgot to bring any rain gear with them? Needless to say, we got soaked, but for the first three hours of trying to get shots, it didn't dampen our spirits. We scrambled

up a rocky ridge and found this turn. At the time, we thought it was pure gold. We clicked off some snaps, and returned home like starving drowned rats.

After editing, I fired the shots over to our client, assuming they would be stoked. But it turned out we had shot on the wrong trail and they couldn't use the photos. In the end we had to reschedule and head out for another wet day in the Welsh mountains.

I woke to the sound of rain against the tent. Guess who forgot to bring any rain gear with them?



